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THE OCCULT GIRL



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LUDA
The Occult Girl

A ROMANCE

By

JULIA WEBB MAYS

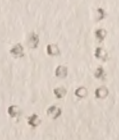


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Luda, The Occult Girl

CHAPTER I

A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

On a Sunday morning in the year of grace 1840, while the air rang with the mocking-bird's triumphant tribute to awakening day, a timid knock was heard upon the galleried door of a cottage by the roadside in an out-of-the-way parish not many miles from New Orleans.

Within the cottage lived John Grey, a journeyman fruit-dryer, his wife and their infant son, Jack; as the knock was repeated, the sleeping child stirred.

"Hush!" said the mother, tiptoeing to the door.

A woman stood on the threshhold. "Puis-je entrer?" she asked feebly.

"Come in," responded Temp: Grey, drawing within the warmth and protection of southern hospitality the unknown guest whose sombre garment, dropping in graceful folds to the feet, served to emphasize the pallor of a beautiful face characterized by the majesty of some tragic experience.

The stranger was gently led to a seat. Her brown eyes turned pleadingly upward, the lids trembled, a brilliant flush o'erspread her wan cheek, as she half-whispered:

"Madame—mon bebe—elle meurt de faim."

Mrs. Grey uttered a startled cry when, lifting the shawl, the woman disclosed a wasted, half-clothed infant.

In a moment the small household was bustling with excited interest. The fruit-dryer's ready proffers of aid as well as his wife's words, "Poor, dear lady!" fell upon almost deafened ears, so weary and heartsore was the young mother who, with closed eyes sobbed a prayer in her own tongue as she resigned her child to be fed and warmed near the great wood-fire over which hung a singing kettle.

From an old chest in the corner, as if by magic, came baby clothes, a soft, fluffy blanket with the odor of spearmint upon it and a pair of faded socks; but no question disturbed the grief-stricken woman, for the Greys knew well that in good time her story would be forthcoming.

A week or more passed. One evening, as twilight's hush fell upon that peaceful wayside home and both children were sleeping, the woman told her story in broken French of which Mrs. Grey caught here and there quite enough to realize it was a sad one, and it was told none too soon, for only a few days thereafter pneumonia, following the dreadful cold brought on by exposure, was too much for her already weakened strength, and the young mother, unknown, unloved, "a stranger in a strange land," passed to the Great Beyond. The Greys buried her in the yard of the parish church of which Mrs. Grey's father was the pastor, placing above her grave a simple stone bearing—with the date—the name found written in her little prayer-book, "Luda Eugenie."

CHAPTER II

THE BIG SANDY VALLEY

Within a stone's throw of the parsonage stood the Grey cottage, and the motherless child became the pet of both homes. The few keepsakes, including the mother's prayer-book, a pendant and a wedding ring, were put safely away for the little Luda when she should become old enough to value them. Meanwhile no word was spoken to indicate that she was other than the daughter of John and Tempe Grey.

At the death of Pastor Reardon, the widow went to reside with her daughter. A few years thereafter John Grey felt obliged to move to some other locality that he might find greater remuneration for his labors. After careful planning they journeyed northward to Ohio where they left Luda with Mr. Grey's sister. Having heard of opportunities for one of his calling in the Kentucky-Virginia country, the fruit-dryer crossed the Ohio River where the valley of the Big Sandy with its grand orchards, its fertile farms and evident prosperity broke upon his vision.

Jack had grown to be a stalwart, manly chap, to whose thoughtful mind, great were the possibilities of the rolling country in and adjacent to this lovely valley, and he enthusiastically encouraged his father in his plans and labors.

Luda remained in Ohio until the home was ready, and when at length she arrived, her eyes sparkled with wonder and delight. Arm in arm, exchanging those happy confidences so dear to the hearts of the young, the brother and sister strolled leisurely to the river. The leaves rustled and fell about them;

the yellow cowslip and ox-eye daisies looked up and smiled, and the stream with its silver waves murmuring over pebble and shell, flowed languidly on.

Jack dipped his sunburned hand in the crystal water and lifting a few drops, tossed them at his sister, exclaiming, "In the name of the song-birds of the Virginias, sister, I christen thee Luda of the Big Sandy."

Across the valley rose the great Cumberland Mountains, their majestic slopes in the smoky distance covered with holly and pine. At the foothills the winding river was shaded by teeming orchards. Manned by slaves, boats laden with fruit and vegetables passed down the ceaseless current, the rhythmic cadences of the crews lingering on the balmy air.

All was mellow beauty—mature greens changing into darker hues of pines and tri-colored oak; sweet-gum trees taking on a thousand tints, and maples glowing golden in the sun.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Luda, as, awe-stricken, her eyes dwelt upon the wonderful scene so new to one reared in a flat, mountainless country.

In the newly-built, double log cabin of the Greys Luda took her part in the housekeeping—spun and wove, churned, sewed and cooked, as was the wont of country girls. In the homes of the wealthy whose plantations lay to the north and south, tutors and governesses were employed, but this luxury did not fall to the lot of the Grey household.

Harvest was at hand, the season for gathering and drying fruit, for garnering grain. The orchards blushed with downy peaches and rosy apples, the great fields were vested in cotton, flax and corn.

An adept in his profession, John Grey's services were sought the length and breadth of the valley,

and he had been engaged to superintend the crops of Colonel Howard, whose acres stretched along both sides of the winding river.

Amid the rush and whir of modern machinery to-day, the interest taken in the old-time methods of fruit-drying, can scarcely be understood. Neighbors came miles to watch its progress, and all ate, drank and were merry.

For the Howard gathering and drying a section of the rail fence enclosing the orchards had been removed, and through the opening, big, broad-horned oxen drew the burdened wagons. Their white teeth shining, their eyes dancing, the blacks vied with each other as they bore away huge baskets of cured fruit upon the cushions of their turbaned heads, the harvesting to them being more sport than work.

CHAPTER III

THE SPELL OF RED-BROWN EYES

One afternoon Guy de Mai—the son of a neighboring planter—a young man of fine physique and gentle bearing, rode into the orchard. Upon a dapple-gray filly cantering at his side was Colonel Howard's pretty daughter. Her leghorn hat, tied with broad, straw-colored ribbons, fell back over her shoulders, revealing a mass of glossy blue-black hair which, undulating with the breeze, floated from her forehead.

Jack Grey, who chanced to be standing near, hastened to assist the young woman to alight, while tell-tale flushes mantled his face. "How nice of you to come, Miss Claudia! And you, Mr. de Mai—it's a treat to see you among the harvesters."

"Thank you. Our coming was entirely the suggestion of Miss Howard," replied her escort, still holding the rein. His eyes wandering over the immediate surroundings fell upon Luda Grey as she plucked at a branch of ripened cherries just above her head. Her skin of ivory whiteness, over which here and there lay a yellow freckle, suggested to his mind a love-lily with the warm kisses of the sun upon it, her hair, falling loosely beneath a dainty sunbonnet was a fitting frame to the lovely picture.

Guy was spellbound by the innocent red-brown eyes which met his glance, while they took on a mystic seriousness under the swaying boughs that shadowed her pensive face. Peculiarly fascinated by the strangeness of her youthful beauty, there flashed through his mind a whimsical fancy to kiss the closely-pressed lips into a smile.

Wholly unconscious of her personal attractiveness, Luda imagined that the young man was mentally commenting on her shoeless feet. This impression, together with the sight of the handsomely-gowned girl animatedly chatting with her brother, filled her with a sense of resentment; and a feeling hitherto unknown overwhelmed her. The color came and went beneath the translucent skin, her small body swayed as the new passion swept her being, and Luda Grey's brain registered its first rebellious thought. "Why must we be always poor! Why do others have everything and we nothing! But where have I seen him before—somewhere, sometime! Where? When?"

The very accent of these people was different from that to which she had been accustomed, yet somehow it was not new to her. Within her soul there sounded a responsive note; which mentally interposed, "I too should live thus—I know it."

As the realization forced itself upon her, the blood bounded through her veins; the great eyes flashed, their color changed; unhappiness and discontent possessed her.

"I want education—opportunity. It is my right. Why, I do not know—but it is—it is!"

This transition from accustomed calm to chaotic passion was effected in a moment, and the strain of the awakening was so overwhelming that involuntarily she sank to the greensward beneath the tree.

To Claudia Howard such actions seemed unceremonious, rude, and if it had not been for a concealed admiration for the girl's brother, she doubtless would have tossed her head and walked away. It suddenly occurred to her however that possibly the unseemly behavior might be caused by embarrassment; so, removing her riding skirt and

throwing it over the pommel of the saddle she left the horse in charge of Guy and approached her.

"Mr. Grey's sister, I believe? I am Claudia Howard. Your brother often spoke of you while you were in Ohio and anxiously looked forward to your homecoming."

"Yes, I am Jack's sister," Luda replied, somewhat recovered, "but—but—I think I'd rather not be."

"Not be his sister!" ejaculated Claudia in wide-eyed wonder, "why, I think your brother most charming."

"Oh, yes—of course—" was the confused response. "Jack is the very best of brothers, too. But we—we can't do things—we can't have things—we just can't. Girls like you have so much to live for and—and—" hiding her face in her hands. "Won't you excuse these silly tears? I can't help it though I try very hard."

Claudia Howard gazed in admiration at the humble fruit-dryer's daughter thus swayed by emotion, who, it seemed to her eclipsed all the so-called well-born girls of the valley, noted for beauty and gracious womanhood. Casting about in her mind as to what next to say or do, she observed Jack approaching. The keen anxiety in the look he fixed upon his sister, rendered him in her opinion handsomer than ever—handsomer even than Guy de Mai who stood interestedly near.

"Why, sister!" he said, encircling her waist, "you were so bright and cheerful when you came to the orchard a moment ago. What is the matter now?" turning an inquiring glance toward Claudia who shook her head as she rose.

"Oh, nothing. I—I—I hardly know myself," Luda answered, resting her head against her brother's broad shoulder. "And I am really ashamed." Truth told the girl's conscience re-

proached her because of the words she had just uttered to Miss Howard. "It was not I. Forgive me, Jack dear," looking affectionately into his face.

"Forgive you? Certainly; but, for what?"

A charming smile dimpled her cheeks as, sitting up quickly, she wiped away a tear and said in soft, half-audible tones, "It was not I—no, it was not I."

"Then I'm sure I don't understand you."

"Look, look!" cried the ever-alert Claudia, appreciating the necessity for changing the subject, "they're robbing Nan Smith of her luscious fruit. Run, Nan, run! Come this way," laughing and clapping her hands as she went to meet her.

All eyes were directed toward the scene beyond, where a volley of big red apples was being fired like snowballs, everyone dodging, and merrily whizzing others in return.

In the excitement Luda had time to collect herself. Glancing furtively from Claudia Howard to the chap who discreetly stood aside watching the sport, she realized that it was their unexpected arrival that had caused within her soul a tumult which had given temporary dominion to a new side of her nature.

A typical gentleman of the period, though but eighteen years of age, Guy de Mai possessed a well-knit figure; fine, clear-cut features; and an aristocratic bearing which, though cordially gracious, was somewhat indolent. The proud maidens of the South, 'twas said, were not only attracted by his personal qualities, but also by the broad acres constituting Ivywild, his home. Then too, he was the only son of a family noted through generations for its manly sons and winsome daughters.

As he stood in Luda's presence that afternoon a vision of his double appeared to her—a soldier

in uniform, with an older and more serious expression in his thoughtful face.

"What fun!" exclaimed the approaching Claudia, "I think had you been there, Miss Grey, we'd have won the battle."

"Battle!" dreamily repeated Luda, slowly passing her hand over her forehead. "Oh, yes," half smiling, "apples were the bullets. Girls like you have so much to make them happy."

"You droll child! But see, see, they're firing again! I'm off," laughed Claudia as away she went.

"Hurrah!" shouted Jack, taking to his heels in hot pursuit, leaving his sister and the stranger quite alone.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE'S AWAKENING

While Luda's eyes followed Jack and Claudia in their animated race, Guy de Mai feasted his upon her, as if lost in thought; then, indicating the spray in her hand, "How lovely those cherries are! May I take one—just one?"

Making no reply save by the flushing of her cheeks, Luda handed him the entire branch of fine blackhearts.

"Can it be possible," he queried mentally, "that this girl will not answer because Jack did not present me?"

"You know who I am, Miss Grey, do you not? Or must I introduce myself?"

"Oh, yes, I do. You are Mr. de Mai. I heard Jack call your name. But I should have known had no one told me." She looked shyly at him, her lips curving coquettishly. "I have heard you called 'the Sandy Valley aristocrat.'"

"So," he exclaimed, involuntarily lifting his head a trifle, yet deeply chagrined. At that moment blood possessed no charm for him. He was fascinated by one of a class in which he had hitherto evinced no interest. His father owned numbers of blacks; and services of the working-class not being required, they had been to him as if they had not existed. But to-day his pride had received a sting from the lips of a poor fruit-dryer's daughter, to which he could find no adequate reply. Orchards, kilns, everything pertaining to the gathering of the fruit, lost their attraction, the thought uppermost in his mind being "For what does aristocratic birth

count if humble parentage produce such beauty and charm as this girl whose eyes seem full of wisdom as deep as the sea?"

The embarrassing silence was suddenly broken by a negro driving up with a load of apples.

De Mai politely held out his hand; "Allow me—you are near the road—in danger." The girl seemed lost to his words and did not move. "Permit me to help you, please—ah, just in time."

Reluctantly she had placed her small hand in his outstretched p..lm, rising to safety, just as the long-horned "calico" oxen passed in state. But a new and greater danger was now imminent; two young hearts were awakening to the sweet peril that may come through a clasp of hands.

A strangely-delicious sensation thrilled the girl. The brightness of day merged into shadowed splendor; a new light suffused her soul; sweet music fell upon her ears; the bow lips rounded, and a soft, flute-like whistle filled the air.

Entranced, Guy listened in silence.

There was an eager, far-away expression in her eyes, a look of expectation, as of one grasping at a thing unseen. Suddenly lifting her gaze like a startled fawn, "Did you hear it?" she asked.

"I heard you, little one. And tell me, won't you, where did you learn to whistle? Such charm, such sweetness! May I not hear it once more?"

"Well, really, I never could whistle a note. I heard singing away down in my heart, and, forgetting where I was, followed the tune."

"Then perhaps it will sing again."

Rising, Luda shook her head sadly, and started to walk away. "Shall we join the others?"

"I would rather talk with you, if you will," he replied.

Down by the river Jack and Claudia were gather-

ing shells. They had given Nan and her merry-makers the slip and, lover-like, strolled away all to themselves. Toward them Guy and Luda leisurely turned their steps. He was inspired by a strange reverence for the singular girl who, though full of simplicity, was yet so mysterious, so unlike any other he had ever met.

"A star—perhaps not of earth! A glittering moonbeam in the shadow of night!"

"Let us stop," he said, as they reached the trunk of an old tree that lay by the path. "We have here a fine view of the mountains; and the waving black top of the sugar-cane reminds one of a vast, dark ocean."

For a time, with two enquiring minds, two deeply-touched natures, they sat unmoved, but near each other on the log. Finally lowering his eyes he met hers unexpectedly upturned, and read therein a message, one born of something stronger than mere sentiment—a message which roused his deepest interest.

To soften as it were the tenseness of the spell she had no doubt cast upon him, he asked, "Tell me, Miss Grey, won't you, why it was that you felt so badly when Miss Claudia was talking to you under the tree?"

"Oh, I can hardly say," she replied, somewhat surprised at his query, "unless it was a sudden realization of our poverty—of my ignorance—and—and——"

"Ignorance! Well, then you must surely be an elf or a fairy," tenderly taking her hand. "Ordinary people like myself acquire knowledge in an ordinary manner, but you seem to possess some subtler method. Ignorance so overdraws the true conditions, I would like to hear what more you would say."

"Oh, the way we must live; no opportunity, no education—nothing for me but work, indoors and out. I do not mind working, but I do rebel at being always so poor. But—" and she hesitated, "why should I tell this to you—a stranger?"

"Please go on. I see no lack of anything in you," he said kindly. "Indeed, I'm positive I never before met such a talented girl. Besides, I do not want to be a stranger to you."

"I know I should be thankful even for what God has chosen to give me," she said, as unbidden tears stole down her rounded cheek. "But when you and Miss Howard rode up, apparently without a care or an unsatisfied wish in the world, my poor heart rebelled at the frightful inequalities of life. You have all the advantages money can give—can have tutors, or go away to school, are surrounded with books and so many pleasures. I would give a lot of my life to have such opportunities, such blessings. I could then make so much of myself, and do so many things for others. You, so differently placed, I'm sure cannot understand the unhappiness of us who are so poor. And when one has been born with an ambitious spirit, a desire to do and be something—it is hard to be so thwarted, so——"

"Oh, you class me with those who have advantages, I see. Now, what would you do if you were in my place?" Hitherto no one had so compelled his admiration, and he eagerly watched her every expression.

"What would I do in your place?" she repeated slowly. "I would be a soldier. You will be one. You can fight, too; I see it."

"Oh, yes, I think I might fight," he exclaimed enthusiastically, "if opportunity presented—which isn't at all probable in our time and country. I've

often thought I'd like to be a soldier—at least I'd like to learn how to be one. But aren't you a queer little girl to divine my thoughts! Why should your mind run in such channels?"

"Who knows what may happen?" she said thoughtfully. "And don't you think we should be prepared for whatever may come? The unexpected often occurs, you know. But I don't understand how one can learn to be a soldier. Soldiers must be born. You were born one—yes, you were," looking at him shyly with a smile, as above their heads, a Virginia redbird winging its way mountainward, alighted on a bough and poured forth a few notes that seemed to the newly-enmeshed lad a very echo to the girl's musical voice. Involuntarily both stood up, their eyes following the wild songster as it rose and flew away, disappearing in mid-air.

They continued their way slowly toward the river, their minds telepathically exchanging communications, two young hearts adjusting themselves to the mechanism of one.

CHAPTER V.

CUPID'S BOW

Jack and Claudia could be seen placing mussel-shells in convenient heaps along the bank that they might collect them on their return to the orchard.

The line between the rich and the "poor white trash" was strictly drawn in the South, people who were too poor to own slaves being usually unlearned as well. Though the daughter of a clergyman, Jack's mother had lost caste by marrying a journeyman laborer; therefore partial education and religious birth gave her little advantage in a slave-holding community. Yet withal the Howards admired her son for his mental qualities, his honesty and sterling uprightness, while their sister Claudia had learned to look for his coming to the plantation with an eagerness which for a time she dared not own even to herself. Each however was fully aware of a growing sentiment for the other, yet supposed the secret quite their own.

So there was a diffidence in the tone of the stalwart son of the fields when as they retraced their steps he said to the college-bred heiress, "We are to have a paring-bee at our house to-morrow night, Miss Claudia. I wish you'd come."

"Why, I'd like so much to come. I've never been to a paring-bee. Of course you'll ask the boys. It must be great fun. What do you do besides pare fruit, Jack?"

"Oh, dance, play games and kiss the girls," he answered teasingly.

"How charming!" quickly responded Claudia, tossing him a sly kiss from the tips of her fingers.



AT THE FORD

Chap. V.

"Ah, here come Guy and your sister. How truly beautiful she is! That color in her cheeks is really divine. She'll make a sensation among the boys in this valley when she is a bit older, mark my words. Each will try to set his individual seal upon that girl."

"Oh ho! fishing with golden willow for mussel shells!" exclaimed Guy. "Left us behind, too, without even an introduction! Well, I like that. And then to come with a girl only to get the mitten—that's positively unforgivable."

His eyes twinkled as he mercilessly teased Claudia who held her own in gay retorts. Chattering like birds they all sauntered back, filling their pockets and even drafting into service the boys' hats as they collected the piles of glistening shells with their varied shades and pearly luster.

"Aren't they lovely! I'm going to outline a crescent bed for forget-me-nots in our garden," said the effervescent Claudia, "and then, don't you see, I'll have a perpetual rainbow."

"And Cupid may string the bow," twitted Guy. "No knowing who might be hit when that sharpshooter takes aim! Better look out, Grey. But I fear Cupid's arrow was shot long before the shells were collected, don't you, Claudia—don't color so."

"Hello there!" called Ned Howard from across the meadow. "What are you all up to? Isn't it time to go home?"

"I had no idea it was so late. See, it is almost sundown," said Claudia.

"That's a fact," affirmed de Mai, consulting his watch. "And I promised to be back by four. The governor asked me to stop for the mail, and I must be off, or the office will be closed."

As the shadows lengthened and the rising mists obscured the sky, the jolly party hurriedly passed

the kilns where the wood-fire blazed brightly under the great layers of drying fruit, continuing their way across to the fence where the horses, tired from standing, nervously pawed the earth.

"I wonder if you would come to our paring-bee to-morrow evening, Mr. de Mai?" asked Jack half-heartedly, as he assisted Claudia to mount.

"Thank you, Grey, I'll see," was the cordial reply.

Since Guy had not received the fruit-dryer's son as graciously as had the other boys in the glen, Jack felt rather timid about inviting him.

"Do you intend going, Claudia?"

"If I can possibly manage—though mother, I fear, won't like it." The last words slipped from her tongue. But quick at controlling situations, she added, "You know to-morrow is sewing-circle day, and all the old maids in the valley take tea at our house. Besides, mother really doesn't approve of my going to parties. I wish very much to come, for," graciously extending her hand to Luda, "I want to know you better."

With good-byes, Guy, Claudia and her brothers, galloped along the roadway, commenting gaily on the pleasant afternoon they had spent, and on the unusual beauty of Luda Grey.

"Such eyes!" exclaimed Claudia. "Skin like alabaster—and to me the few brown freckles only enhance its brilliance. Isn't is so, Guy?" smiling suspiciously at him.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Ned, "she'll outshine you all, Claudia. I might be fallin' in love with her myself. Who knows! Think she'd encourage a feller a bit?"

"That girl! Why, she thinks about as much of love as you do of geometry," emphatically declared Guy. Whereat they all roared with laughter, even Ned appreciating the force of the remark, for he

was too full of deviltry to be a serious student.

"There is a lot of wisdom in that little head. And," continued de Mai, with a sly glance from the corner of his eye, "she isn't a bit like her big brother either, Miss Claudia."

"I don't know so much about that," retorted the girl saucily as the two paired off. "I reckon Jack Grey can hold his own with most of you boys. He's mighty smart and, though it may be natural aptness, he knows more in a minute about astronomy and botany and the like than you and Ned have ever known in your whole lives, Guy de Mai. Why, Jack Grey can really tell you just what stars are inhabited planets. Isn't that worth while?"

"'I swah to de Lawd,' it's easy to see where Claudia's mind is. I won't say her heart, for she might scratch my eyes out," harped Guy, with a broad grin.

"Scratch your eyes out, indeed! I wouldn't take the trouble. If you had eyes like Jack Grey's they might be worth having. Now, how do you like that?"

"At this Guy parodied merrily, but for her ears only:

> "A maid there was who loved Jack Grey,
> And she was wondrous wise;
> She jealous grew on one fine day,
> And scratched out both his eyes."

Setting spur to his horse he was soon far in the lead. Claudia was a sweet-tempered girl and, laughing good-naturedly, started Kitty after him, catching up at the cross-roads.

"Well, Claudia," said Guy, with a roguish look as she drew rein at his side, "since the best of friends must part at the dividing of the way, I'll cast that mitten you gave me at the feet of Jack Grey."

CHAPTER VI

A MEETING IN A STAGE COACH

The de Mai plantation lay along the river farther down, and Guy urged his bay onward, soon dismounting at the country post office. So preoccupied was he with thoughts of Luda Grey that he hardly noticed a young woman who stepped from the office just as he was about to enter. Presently he heard in tones which, in spite of their softness, betrayed annoyance, "Give that back. Give it to me, I say, you blue-ribbon beauty!" and turning in the direction whence the voice came, saw Medoc tossing high his head, between his teeth a woman's straw hat. Before him stood a girl, tall, slender, attractive, whose smiling face belied the petulance of her speech.

"Sir," she said, in mock despair, "if this magnificent fellow were not a dear old Kentucky blue-grass, I'm perfectly sure I should hate him, for that is positively my only hat; and I'm in a dilemma, for I've been told that the family with whom I am to live is particularly fastidious."

It flashed through Guy's mind that his mother was expecting a young woman from Lexington, Kentucky—a governess for his sisters; and for diversion he resolved to conceal his identity.

Though Guy de Mai was heart-whole and fancy-free when the sun rose, now, at its setting, he was but half himself. Luda Grey had knocked hard at the door of his heart; else he might have succumbed to the fascination of this blue-grass stranger whose

roguish eyes scanned Medoc still continuing his antics with her hat—her lovely leghorn.

"You bad creature!" said his master, attempting to recover the bit of headgear, Medoc meanwhile shaking his mane and laying his ears back as if to say, "Ah, sir, you can't have it."

"My mother would have sent the rockaway had you informed her of your coming." At her look of amazement, the young man added, "Pardon me, I am Guy de Mai. We are expecting Miss Louns, and I take it you are she."

He succeeded in wrenching the hat from Medoc's teeth, and stood endeavoring awkwardly to rearrange the crushed marguerites.

"I *am* Miss Louns, of Kentucky. I left the boat at the landing and, being fond of walking, thought I would acquaint myself with the beauties of this valley of which I've heard so much. I find it exceeds its reputation. It is indeed a fairy garden," she said, her eyes wandering over the landscape.

"We think it pretty fine," rejoined Guy, admiring the matter-of-fact way in which she had accepted the destruction of her fascinating broadbrim. It occurred to him that he had quite forgotten the mail, and, holding Medoc's bridle irresolutely, he glanced toward the office; when Miss Louns, divining his wish, exclaimed:

"Oh, don't mind; I'll hold him. And I prophesy we shall yet be friends, notwithstanding his ill-manners at our first meeting."

Handing her the rein, Guy re-entered the office.

Patting the neck of the thoroughbred she whispered, "Oh, that I might mount you and ride away like mad—away—back to old Kentucky, and ease this terrible gnawing at my heart. Why did I come! Why *did* I come!"

Attracted by the sound of wheels, and recognizing the voice of Bepo, the stage-driver, Guy decided to wait for the next distribution.

The old rattle-trap stage coach, bespattered with mud and held together with ropes, nails and crude fixings, was dear to the hearts of the planters along the route from Richmond to the Ohio Valley, any of whom was glad to house and feed Bepo out of gratitude for his weekly budget from the outside world. The chubby horses, Nell and Charley, were so slow that it had been said "they could travel all day in the shade of a single tree." Bepo, however, declared them superior to fidgetty ones that are unfit for mountain roads.

"Wall, I do declah," exclaimed Bepo as Guy approached, "yo's gittin' as big as yoh daddy. How's the majah, anyhow? Hit's purty hot down heah in th' valley; cooler on the mountains. Say, Guy, hain't yer got nothin' to cheer a fellah up—little old Kentucky Bourbon or so, eh? Had a kind o' smotherin' spell comin' out an' need a drap o' somethin'. Yes, hed a skeery trip, big paintah jumped on Nell an' clawed her face. See her left eye, all bloody? Emptied mah rifle at th' wild beast, but all th' time th' devilish thing kep' jest in front o' Nell's head, an' a fellah's afeard ter shoot—danger o' killin' th' hosses. Had a pine knot on th' top, an' quick as I could strike a light, th' thing lit out, I'm purty bad skeered sometimes when it's rainy an' dark in th' mountains, an' hain't got nobody along. Lots o' wildcats an' th' like, but I ginnerly keep 'em off ef they hain't too starved. Hit's no fun ter tote this heah mail; but I reckon I've done it so long I wouldn't know whah t' fetch up at ef I hadn't ter make this heah trip evah week. Say, Guy, do yer reckon this young fellah 'long with me could

stop over night at yoh daddy's? He's goin' t' Louisville, he ses, an' I s'pect he'll hev t' hev a hoss ter git part way. Ez you all got plenty o' niggahs, maybe the majah might hev him toted t' whar he gits a boat, I told him I reckoned he would, kase he's allus right good 'bout sich things."

During this conversation the passenger fixed his eyes upon Miss Louns. He was no doubt surprised that in this mountain country where he had expected to find only primitive types, he should see people of such smart appearance. In spite of his interest in the strange scenes and weird happenings of the way, nothing had proven of more interest than these two young people, the one talking to Bepo, the other holding the bridle of so fine a horse.

After delivering the mail bags, Bepo, assured that the stranger could be lodged at Ivywild, announced to him the information; and the gentleman, tossing him a few coins, was about to descend when Guy, having thus found a way to get Miss Louns to the plantation, requested him to keep his seat as the coach would be driven to the house.

"How long I've kept you! But you were chatting with Medoc and seemed oblivious of everything else, perhaps you did not realize the imposition," said Guy, returning to the girl.

"Ah, 'tis true, Mr. de Mai, I have been so absorbed in this shiny-coated, intelligent monster, I did quite forget all else except that I am so far away from home and friends."

"But you are going to find friends at Ivywild. I have arranged with Bepo to drive you over."

"How very thoughtful of you."

"This will be preferable to walking. And besides, it would be dark before you could accomplish the journey. Even with the stage it will be necessary to hurry a little."

"Thank you. I shall indeed be glad to get to your house. Already I've found a friend in this blue-grass creature—Medoc, you call him? An odd name. I'm sure I shall like your sisters, and soon forget my homesickness."

"My mother will make you feel at home," answered Guy, as he led the way to the coach and assisted Miss Louns up the muddy steps. The passenger inside, lifting his hat, moved to give her first place, but the horses started suddenly, causing such a jolt that she plunged forward; to save herself she caught hold of the door which unfortunately—as Bepo gave the strap a hard pull—closed upon her fingers.

Guy had gone for Medoc, now restless under Bepo's repeated "Gee, Nell! Git-ap, Charley!" but hearing a scream, ran back, shouting for the driver to stop.

By this time the passenger had released the imprisoned hand and with a professional air was making an examination. The postmaster's wife brought bandages and he skilfully bound three bruised fingers.

The slowness of the journey afforded time for the girl to regain composure. Guy passed them as they neared Ivywild and directed Lorenzo to fetch the young lady to the house. So Ruth Louns was almost carried in the arms of the stalwart darky up the path to her new home. Such attentions were not unfamiliar, for she had been petted, loved and "toted" by her Uncle Richard's slaves all her young life.

Taking the girl into the family room, Lorenzo placed her on the settee. Black Hannah made her as comfortable as possible, while Dilsey brought a glass of brandy and water.

Her fellow-passenger was most solicitous. Con-

sulting her pulse, he advised that she be put directly to bed. Thanking Mrs. de Mai for consenting to receive him, he handed her a card on which was engraved, "Leslie Lee Hamilton, M.D., Richmond, Virginia."

CHAPTER VII

"MISS LILA-LILY"

From the breakfast-room the next morning Guy strolled to the lawn where he gathered some flowers for his mother's sewing-table.

Coupled with a thought of the beautiful dark-eyed Luda Grey came the mental query, "I wonder why father does not gather flowers for mother. It seems to me if I loved a woman well enough to marry her I would bring her the sweetest and loveliest every day. Nothing, in my estimation, so exquisitely expresses the sentiment of a soul. If I should ever possess a wife like Luda Grey—I—" and he flushed to the roots of his hair at the daring thought, for it seemed to him the whole world must have understood. "What man could help falling in love with her—so irresistibly beautiful, yet so unconscious of it," he rhapsodized.

He ordered Rush to bring Medoc, and rode down the wooded path along the river, wholly resigning himself to happy meditations. Everything charmed him—the trees, the flowers, the water; all nature glowed with loveliness. There was no doubt of his infatuation for her of whose existence he had scarcely been cognizant the morning before.

The family at Ivywild awakened from the surprises of the previous evening at an early hour! and, from master to servant, was planning and preparing for the duties appertaining to the new regime of teacher and pupils. The governess, however, did not put in an appearance. Dr. Hamilton was requested by his hostess to visit with her the patient's

room. It was found that notwithstanding Dilsey's dubious report, "Young Missy purty sick—no mistake 'bout it," that, except for a slightly nervous condition, she was progressing satisfactorily. The doctor advised quiet for the day; and, gratified by the success attained with his first patient, went with Mrs. de Mai to enjoy the mountain scenery from the broad piazza, mentally considering meanwhile the propriety of accepting Major de Mai's cordial invitation to remain for a few days' rest. It was a great temptation, augmented by his desire to become better acquainted with the interesting Kentucky girl who, like himself was a stranger in the valley.

"I have never seen anything to equal the beauty of this scene," he declared "The trees with their great spreading branches, the awe-inspiring grandeur of the mountains, the cool, placid waters on their way to 'la belle riviere,' far exceed anything I had expected to see this side of Greenbrier River."

While conversing with the mother, from the rear of the house appeared her daughters, Lila and Lily, chatting excitedly. One of them held a hummingbird which a black child had caught and injured as it sipped from the honeysuckle. They were both speaking at once, their kindly natures denoted by the cries of "Poor birdie!" "Sweet, precious, wounded baby!"

This was the doctor's first sight of the little girls, having arrived after their bedtime. Surprise written on his face, his eyes twinkling, he involuntarily ejaculated, "Twins!"

Each being the exact counterpart of the other, even the slaves were puzzled, so they called them "Miss Lila-Lily."

"You little darlings!" exclaimed the doctor. "Two forget-me-nots." He made friends with them by setting the crippled wing of the bird, then making

a nest of cotton and going with them to place it in a tree.

The little girls who were to be Miss Louns' special charge, had been, it is needless to say, the joy and distraction of the house all the twelve years of their lives, and the doctor, the latest victim to their charms, determined to find a way to distinguish them; so, after learning their names, he seated himself on the piazza, and taking one at each knee, made a critical study of them.

Returned from his ride, Guy walked leisurely up the path to the great house, casually switching the dust from his trousers.

"Good morning, Mr. de Mai," said the doctor, rising to greet him. "You see I am agreeably entertained by your delightful but bewildering sisters. 'Tis the first time in my life I have been unable to distinguish between two persons, and am still unwilling to concede it. You are much engaged, I take it, since I have not had the pleasure of seeing you earlier this morning. I'm happy, however, to have that pleasure now."

"Thank you, doctor," replied Guy, smiling. "If riding to kill time makes a busy man, then I'm busy indeed."

"Riding to kill time, eh? That *is* a singular occupation for one of your type. Idleness kills more than time. It's murder sometimes—downright murder of self-esteem, pride, aspiration; and you are not, in my opinion, the man to be contented with such life. I too, could have lived thus, Mr. de Mai, for I also am the son of a well-to-do father, and my mother left me a competence. But my grandfather Lee left me a greater inheritance—the inheritance of ambition, the desire of accomplishing, the longing to carve out success. Possessed of a sufficiency of this world's goods, I am not compelled

to work; yet I shall not be satisfied until by my own efforts I have made a mark for myself. And it is solely for such purpose I am here to-day, away from home and friends—all."

There was a pause as the speaker's eyes followed Lila and Lily racing over the lawn.

"Observing you coming up the path, I could but note your fine carriage, your well-proportioned head, evidencing high mentality, and remarked to myself, 'What a splendid fellow—one destined for work in the world that no other can accomplish!—but, pardon; I do not wish to appear officious, but your strong personality, your undeniable ability, have tempted me to expostulate."

"Go on," said Guy, apparently not in the least disconcerted. "You interest me greatly indeed. It is quite true I have indulged more or less in idle habits; but there had been nothing in my surroundings to prompt one otherwise. Yet to-day, your words fall upon my heart as a message of inspiration; and though my ambition has been dormant heretofore, real life seems just opening before me, and I have, quite lately too, determined to make the most of my opportunities."

"Then, if I am sent here to help you resolve upon a purposeful life, Mr. de Mai, I am a factor for good, am I not? The greatest men of the age are those who in youth have been thus surrounded by the wonders of Nature," and he waved his hand toward the beautiful landscape.

The conversation was interrupted by the return of the twins who, laying siege to their brother, bombarded him with a double fire of eulogies upon their new governess.

"Oh, she is a darling, brother Guy," said one.

"Too dear for anything," said the other.

"We already love her," lisped a voice.

"Yes, indeed," lisped the other.

"You are to come out under the apple-tree, brother, where Miss Louns is with mamma."

"Yes, mamma said you were to come," was the reply to Guy's look of uncertainty.

"And the doctor?"

"Yes, everybody." And away they skipped hand in hand, impatient to rejoin mamma and the fascinating teacher.

Exchanging greetings, the doctor held out his hand to Miss Louns. "The old story, young lady! Doctors prescribe only to have their prescriptions tucked away perhaps between the leaves of a book and forgotten, the patient meanwhile recovering of her own will-power. But I'm greatly pleased to see you. Outside, this heavenly morning will be a tonic in itself. Isn't it glorious here! For my part I'm afraid I could be easily persuaded to spend the Autumn in this valley."

After shaking hands with Guy and laughingly inquiring after her friend Medoc, Miss Louns seated herself near the doctor, who, meanwhile, was mentally ejaculating as he watched the changing expression of her intellectual face and the graceful toss of her head, "What conversational power! what liquid tones! what delicious accent! Eyes that speak faster than words." The doctor no doubt was rapidly becoming entangled in a mesh as intricate and delicate as that in which the spider entraps the unwary fly, therefore, being not so good a listener as usual, the lady's facetious remark as to the possibility of her having died had it not been for his efficient services, was lost upon him. However he joined in the merry laugh apropos the great ado over their double advent in the valley.

"Providence, Miss Louns, would take care of such as you, even if it became necessary to call a poor

doctor from over the mountains as his agent. You see," he continued more seriously, "physicians do not depend entirely upon drugs. They do believe in the God-mind, the Always Abounding. To be of service to our fellowmen is one of the first principles in our manual of practice. To be of service to one who so richly deserves, is indeed most gratifying."

Taking her wounded hand in his, he noted her pulse—mentally observing that his own had never beat so quickly as at that particular moment.

Had Dr. Hamilton met in the wilds of western Virginia his soul-mate, his twin-spirit?

The party was broken by a call to dinner, after which function Guy confided to Mammy Dilsey that he was going to a party in the evening. A special shirt, one his mother had made with many fancy plaits, and his satin waistcoat were placed in readiness; also his largest silk kerchief carefully folded. For the first time in his life, aside from his general desire to be well groomed, Guy de Mai was fastidious as to his appearance.

In the afternoon Miss Louns and Mrs. de Mai visited the study-room, going over the matter of books to be purchased, and discussing the advisability of the girls beginning French.

Dr. Hamilton chatted with the major upon his journey—its continuance on the morrow as well as his future intentions. To their mutual surprise they discovered that they were from the same part of old Virginia and that the major had been a schoolmate of the young man's father, Senator Hamilton. The doctor, having recently graduated, was on his way to Louisville where he had the prospect of a lucrative practice. The major, greatly pleased at this opportunity to hear of the friends of his boy-

hood days, endeavored to induce him to remain much longer.

"However, at your wish, my man Lorenzo will accompany you on horseback as far as Catlettsburg where you can procure transportation by boat down the Ohio via Cincinnati to Louisville. The water in the Sandy is very low at this season, and if Miss Louns had been even a day later her boat could hardly have come through."

At the closing of a pleasantly-spent day, Miss Louns in a pretty challis gown came down with the twins to watch the sun as it passed over the red-green treetops of the mountain. And as the exquisite tricolored glows died away and evening shadows fell over Ivywild, Guy mounted Medoc and set out for the paring-bee, his heart yearning for little Luda of the Grey household.

CHAPTER VIII

WILL HE COME?

While assisting her mother in preparing for the company, Luda hummed a mournful old-time tune, sighing now and then. Mrs. Grey noted with surprise her apparent sadness, as it was unusual for her to be other than buoyant and happy.

"Luda dear, we are to have many people to-night, and I want you to look your very best. My little daughter must appear as well as the other girls, you know, for it is to be her introduction to the young folks of the neighborhood. What will you wear? I think your gingham is prettiest, don't you?"

"Yes, mother, it is prettiest—but I wore it yesterday. They will think I have only one frock. And you know I love to—I—they——" and she looked imploringly at her mother.

"They! Who?"

"Why, Miss Claudia and Mr. de Mai. They are so stylish and dressy, and Miss Claudia looks so lovely."

"Oh, yes, Claudia Howard and her friend, I remember seeing them at the kilns yesterday. She *is* a pretty girl—and I never have seen a much finer-looking gentleman."

This was uttered in a matter-of-fact tone, implying that Claudia held a sort of proprietorship which caused a sudden sinking in Luda's heart; for if that were true, it would matter little what *she* wore. With a woman's instinct however, she successfully hid her disturbed feelings.

"Miss Claudia's sweetheart?" she mused. "Then, I wonder why she left him and went with Jack? I remember, too, he was so quiet for a long time

after they had gone—That's just it; Jack had taken Miss Claudia off and left him with me. How stupid of me not to have understood!"

She sat on a bench, her face in her hands, humming the doleful tune over and over, but her thoughts were not of the song.

"Yes, I see; Guy de Mai is in love with Miss Howard. But I believe she likes our Jack—I wonder why, every time I tried to speak to him, something in my throat stopped me? Was it that he did not seem like a stranger, but was like someone I had known a long time ago? I wonder if Guy noticed this?—I'm not sufficiently acquainted with him to call him Guy. Mother says now I am getting to be a young lady I must call all gentlemen 'Mr.' for it is not nice to be familiar—I must not let him see that I care for him. Ah, poor me!" she said, rising, "I am not like Miss Claudia. I would not dare do things altogether excusable in her. She is rich; I—very, very poor."

How Luda hated the word *poor*. Her soul revolted at it. But the tenor of her thoughts was changed by the arrival of Nan Smith who had come over to lend her aid in baking.

"I'm going to have great fun with the folks when they come to the cakes," remarked that young woman. "I intend to bake a lot of crude figures made of sweet dough, and we'll have some sport."

Though scarcely twenty-three, Nan was dubbed "old maid." At this period in southern communities, girls married extremely young, and if one reached the age of eighteen without becoming engaged, she was considered as quite at the danger mark.

While the two were discussing cakes, Mrs. Grey came from the milk-house. "I've skimmed the milk, Luda, and put the cream in the churn out in the

shade of the plum-tree. You'll find it all covered, and a nice white apron. Add a little warm water to the cream, and churn as quickly as possible. Sweet butter is needed for the pie-crust, you know."

Under the spreading branches of the plum-tree, the ripening fruit above her, Luda Grey drank in Nature's loveliness. Vigorously plying the wooden dasher she sang the churn song Grandma Reardon had taught her when she was still a wee girl:

"Come, butter, come; come, butter, come.
Peter's standing at the gate,
Waiting for a butter-cake.
Come, butter, come.

"Grandma was smart," she said laughingly, as she recalled her childish faith in the efficacy of these lines. "Naturally, the faster I sang, the faster I churned, and the quicker I finished."

Exhilarated, her mind flew to anticipations of the evening, her first home-party.

She was, as Longfellow says,

"Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet;
Gazing with a timid glance
On the brooklet's swift advance
To the river's broad expanse."

"Will he come? And will he ask me to be his partner in a dance—he, an aristocrat?—I don't see why God made some folks so much better off than others. If poor girls marry poor boys, they usually remain poor. I, for one, will marry no poor man's son. I just won't, that's all."

The dash became heavy, the churning difficult; her task was accomplished.

"Here's your butter, mother," she said, returning to the kitchen.

Jack entered at the same time to ask if he could be of service. "If not needed, I'll take myself off to get the pans and piggins ready, sharpen the peeling knives, and bring benches to the yard. It promises to be a beautiful night, and no doubt everybody will prefer to sit outside."

But Mr. Jack did not intend to leave the kitchen without a taste of the good things, and took a handful of golden cakes, crowded them into his mouth and reached for more, just to tease the girls.

"Go away, Jack Grey, or I'll introduce your head to this rolling-pin. I'm not making cakes to waste," cried Nan, keen for excitement. "There, don't touch my yaller gals and boys! See!"

"Say, Jack," said Luda, "will the Howard boys and the Whitneys come, do you suppose?"

"Yes, I'm sure the Howards will. By the way, sister, why not set your cap for Ned Howard? He's one of the best chaps in the valley. I saw him looking your way several times yesterday."

"He has a nice sister, too, hasn't he, Jack?" Luda laughed happily, while her brother blushed as red as the cockscomb growing in the yard.

"Yes, lovely; and sweet as a rose to boot. There, didn't I say that nicely?"

"Sweet! sweet! Now Jack, you don't know, do you? 'Fess up. Oh, Miss Nancy, see how red Jack's face is."

"Well, no; that's true. But one must kiss and not tell." His lips crinkled into a half-serious smile at his own words.

"Mr. Guy de Mai will bring Miss Claudia, and I reckon he won't give you much of a chance." Then another pair of lips took on a serious curve.

"But, Luda, you don't think de Mai is in love

with Claudia Howard, do you?" questioned Jack, his face troubled.

"Do I think so? Well, don't you? Mother does, and I think it's plain to be seen."

Jack abruptly left the room, the sweet of the cakes turned to bitter. Although he gave himself in manly fashion to his work, his mind was busy dwelling on the various phases of the situation, and his heart was full of inquiries, such as, "Does Claudia love another?"

"If Guy de Mai loves Miss Claudia he would be a dangerous rival for such as me. What have I to offer her?" For the first time poverty loomed up as a mighty inconvenience to this son of toil, as he confessed grimly to himself, "I haven't the ghost of a chance."

Then and there a spirit of ambition was born within him. "I *will* have money. I must have something to offer the girl I would ask to marry me."

Luda watched Jack's face, and noting his downcast mien, her heart almost lost the joys of anticipation. Anyway, she knew the time was near when both Jack and she would learn the truth. But all the while, something new to her heart stirred a lingering hope within her, bringing to her rounded cheeks a beautiful flush that did not quickly disappear. And though the desire to wear her favorite gown was checked by her mother's statement that nothing would remove peach stains, still, such is the perversity of the feminine heart that she was willing to risk even her precious white dress in order that the young man who possessed her thoughts might see her at her best. Mrs. Grey settled that matter however by saying, "And in pink, daughter, you look as dainty as the sweetbrier bud among its lovely foliage."

Supper was served at six. Not interested in

"frolics," as he termed the coming diversion, Mr. Grey decided to call on Nan's father. Mr. Smith was a Methodist preacher who, having no regular charge, went as an exhorter whenever and wherever he had an opportunity; while his family, appreciating the uncertain character of his "calls," remained comfortably at home in the Sandy Valley. Denominational lines were not closely drawn here, and the people, often divided upon matters of minor importance, were ever ready to unite in upholding a common cause. So Mr. Grey was sure of an entertaining call.

Mrs. Grey, pleased to have her husband relax from his daily labors, did the honors of the evening. Trained by her mother, a superior woman of the old school she was in this respect somewhat in advance of her associates. But there was always so much to be done, and those with whom she came in contact valued education so little, that she had rather neglected both Luda and Jack.

Granny Reardon took slight notice of what was going on, dividing her attention between her pipe and her knitting. The evening meal over, she would take her accustomed place in a low rocking-chair, and knit and smoke perhaps until time to retire. Luda often confided her childish wishes and annoyances to her grandmother who sympathized with and petted her. Everybody loved this good old lady who, a devout hardshell baptist, a thorough Bible woman, had been of the greatest help to her husband in his gospel work. Soon after landing in New England she had married Mr. Reardon, a young minister, and they had migrated south, where their daughter, Tempe, was born.

The Greys loved Luda, scarcely realizing she was not their own. One only in the valley seemed to have some inkling of the facts—a so-called "silly"

familiarly known as "Crazy Joe," who often mystified the community by uncanny predictions, foretelling a time when houses reaching to the clouds would be so constructed that the inmates standing still, could ascend or decend from floor to floor; when animals would not be required for conveying vehicles; when the upper air would be used for purposes of transportation, and when voices might be heard not only across vast spaces on earth but from the remotest planets in the universe. Joe was indeed a peculiar type of genius, and had his real ability been duly appreciated, he might have been received as a sort of prophet. He predicted the Civil War as a consequence of the traffic in negroes; and often foretold local events which actually occurred.

One day while on an errand to the Grey cottage, Joe's eyes rested intently upon the daughter of the house; taking her hand, he said in the presence of Mrs. Grey, "Wull, I've heard o' hawks in eagles' nests, an' doves in chicken broods; I've even seed young squirrels when their own mothers was shot, nussed and loved by cats. An' I tell you, these mothers is sometimes better'n rale ones. It's natur's law that rale mothers takes care o' their own; but the other kind does it jist from goodness o' heart."

"But tell me, Joe, do you *really* see all the things you so often speak of? And do people, unseen and unheard by others, actually talk to you?" asked Luda.

Joe answered in the affirmative, though he did not quite understand that she was another to whom the doors of the invisible world were partly opened. She had put the question for information on a matter which not only puzzled her but has puzzled scientists from time immemorial.

CHAPTER IX

AN OLD-TIME PARING-BEE

As the sun dropped slowly behind the craggy mountain tops the young folks began to arrive from every direction, on foot, on horseback—not infrequently, pillion. So anxious were they to have the fruit ready for the kilns that few took time for proper greetings; and almost before the family was aware of it, the benches were quite filled and busy fingers at work.

It seemed to Luda that everybody had arrived except those she most wished to see—Claudia Howard, her brothers and Guy de Mai. And she felt more and more disappointed as the minutes lengthened into half hours and still they did not make their appearance.

"Since they promised," said Mrs. Grey when Luda asked her opinion, "they will of course be here later on—unless something has happened to prevent; and in such case, I feel sure Miss Howard would send word."

It was indeed a happy, rollicking company of lads and lasses, tossing jokes and peelings indiscriminately, and telling fortunes by "naming apples" and counting the seeds according to a magic formula whereupon the state of affairs between the possessor of the apple and the person for whom it had been named was believed to have been mercilessly disclosed.

Nan Smith named Jennie Coates' apple; Jennie, hastily cutting it, extracted the seeds and began counting:

"'One, I love; two, I love;
Three, I love, I say;
Four, I love with all heart;
Five, I cast away;
Six, he loves; seven, she loves;
Eight, both love,
Nine, he comes——'"

"'He comes!'" interrupted Nan. "Well, we shall see."

"Let me name yours, Nan," said Jack.

"All right. I'll select a nice one—a red harvest."

"Oh, there now, I've dropped some seeds!" squeaked Jennie, who had not yet completed her count to her satisfaction. Pretending to pick them up, she continued, "I had nine, and these three make twelve; so,

"'Nine, he comes; ten, he tarries;
Eleven, he courts; and twelve,—he marries.'"

Jennie finished with a triumphant flourish, but she changed her tune somewhat when Nan added mischievously:

"I didn't name it Ned Howard. Did I, Jack?"

Bob White, sitting next to Luda, was called upon to name another. "But you shan't know the name until the seeds are counted," said Bob. "It isn't fair. Is it, boys?"

The prompt "No" of one was echoed by the others. Luda dropped the seeds she had so carefully counted; she heard the noise of approaching hoofs in the lane, and in the twilight all recognized Guy de Mai with the Howard boys, their sister Claudia and another young woman—the girls in advance.

Jack Grey led in the rush to meet them as they neared the gate.

Unfortunately, Luda tripped on a trailing hop-vine and fell. Bob, at her side in an instant, assisted her to the nearest bench; and though she attempted to assure those who crowded anxiously around her that she would be all right in a moment or two, her drawn face belied the declaration.

After expressing deepest sympathy for Luda, Claudia entered thoroughly into the spirit of the hour, and was immediately the life of the party. Her fingers dripping with juice from the over-ripe fruit, she was working as she would never dream of doing at home.

Though her teeth often clenched to suppress an expression of pain in the rapidly-swelling ankle, Luda—determined not to mar the pleasure of the gay crowd—made heroic efforts to appear free from suffering.

Guy took a seat beside Nan Smith, supplying her with apples, and chatting upon topics of general interest. Nan's family belonged neither to the rich nor to the very poor, so she lived in a little world of quite her own making. She had inherited a love for books; and, as a true book-lover usually obtains the precious volumes he desires, she had collected a modest library which contained more food for thought than many a larger one of to-day. She knew her Bible, her Shakespeare, her histories and works of travel; the latter, though not always up to date, served nevertheless to give her a fair idea of the great world beyond the valley of the Big Sandy. Dr. Hampton was not only a scholar but a studious, liberal-minded man, and, although a "close communist," he had greatly aided the daughter of the Methodist brother in her delvings into literature, the result being that he had become a staunch ad-

mirer of the girl whose love of sport had not quenched her thirst for knowledge. Nan was clever; and this evening, enthusiastically animated over the subjects under discussion with Guy, talked so intelligently that he had little inclination to join in the pranks of the other folks, but was greatly interested in her convincing views of the advantages of higher education for young men. Her words made so deep an impression on his mind that it seemed as if the events of the past two days had been ordered for his personal benefit. He spoke of a secret longing, a hitherto unexpressed desire to be superior to the usual type of rich men's sons who in the South were only expected to dress well, ride well, play cards, breed and race fine horses, indulge themselves in whatever pleased their fancy, but never under any circumstances to condescend to to anything resembling physical work. He was agreeably surprised at the sound advice given him by the level-headed young woman when he told her his hope of receiving military training at West Point, of the necessary preparations for such a course, of the preliminary studies, the examinations he would be required to pass before he could enter that academy. Deep in his soul the desire grew into a resolve, and he determined to speak to his father the very next morning and ask him to take steps toward securing the scholarship.

Engrossed with the topic the two were quite unconscious of the raillery about them till interrupted by the clearing away of the fruit preparatory to the much-desired dancing.

The beauty of the lawn was intensified by a harvest moon which shed a mellow light of gladness over it. The flickering pitch-pine torches, together with the glittering stars above made the scene one

of fascinating loveliness, imparting ecstatic joy to the romantic hearts of the gay crowd.

As the fiddler scraped his bow athwart the strings of his old violin, a signal for dancing, Bill Mack, master of ceremony, called out, "Take your partners for a reel."

Nan, by reason of her studious dignity, had not always been fortunate in securing partners; nevertheless, on this occasion, she was not to be a wallflower, and when the leader called for an extra couple to fill out the second set, Guy asked her to join him, at the same time glancing furtively at Luda who sat quietly with her foot resting on a low stool.

Not being able to dance from the intense pain in her ankle, Luda's pale face had grown thoughtfully serious. But despite Guy's apparent indifference, when their eyes suddenly met across the swinging lines, it was a meeting never to be effaced from the memory of either; and, though peculiarly impressed for the moment, Luda experienced a strange consolation. A voice within her seemed to echo and re-echo: "You have lived and loved before; you will again, and forever. He belongs to your life and you belong to his. You are being drawn closer and closer together. 'Tis a Fate, an existing oneness, no barrier can suffice to break or dissipate."

Nan was a delightful partner, and Guy as courtly and deferential in his manner as a cavalier to some spoiled society queen. On reaching the foot of the line he found himself near Luda who sat quietly endeavoring to hide the pain she was enduring.

"Does not this jolly music tempt you to dance, Miss Grey?" he asked. "Would you favor me with the next quadrille, and may I not sit here at your feet so that no one may steal in ahead of me?" Excusing himself to Nan, Guy sank to the low stool.

"It would be delightful to dance, I know, but when I move my foot I find it uncomfortably lame. So I fear I must forego the pleasure."

"Lame!" he repeated in surprise, as she made an effort to rise.

But the attempt was futile. "Yes—and isn't it too bad that this should have happened now! You know, Mr. de Mai, I sprained my ankle a moment ago, as you folks rode up."

"No, I was not aware of such misfortune. I'm very sorry."

"I'm sure it would relieve you if I bandaged it," said Nan, who had stood by watching and duly appreciating the changes going on in the two youthful expressions. "It ought to be done before it swells."

"So bad as that, and we did not know a thing about it!" exclaimed Guy. "Yes, do look after it, Miss Nan."

Luda rebelled. "If I may not dance, I at least wish to look on," she said.

Ned Howard took Nan for the next quadrille, and for the rest of the evening she found herself most popular.

Luda did not seem surprised when Guy spoke of his aspirations, of his resolve to spend the next few years at college—where in imagination he saw himself the recipient of well-earned honors, perhaps returning to the girl who in his present opinion eclipsed all others, asking her to share them with him. She was fully cognizant of the difference between her station in life and that of the only son of a rich planter and slave-holder. She realized also that a still greater chasm must separate them when he should acquire such military dignity as was to be his fate. That it was ordained he must follow this calling, she was also sure. The years that he must be absent loomed a lifetime. Yet the small

voice still whispered, "Your lives belong together." Thus conflicting thoughts were brought more forcibly to her, because of the true situation; and the assurances of the unseen forces were a greater problem than she could solve.

Guy was not able to fathom the mind-workings of his seriously-inclined companion who, putting few questions to him, displayed in her responses to his, such marvellous knowledge.

He was under her spell, and realized it—a spell he could not comprehend. Yet, though realizing he was hopelessly enthralled, he too, felt an uplift, a sort of joy, and he reveled in the experience.

"Should I really go east, as I now hope to do, I shall look forward with pleasure to seeing you here on my return, Miss Grey." He spoke with boyish enthusiasm, for he had been making gigantic strides in his mind, so that his going had become a foregone conclusion.

"Yes, yes, I hope so," she answered, in little more than a whisper. "Something tells me you are to go soon; and that same something tells me I shall remain here." But, that a master shadow followed his return which seemed to encompass both him and herself, she did not inform him. "It is delightful to travel—even if only in dreams, as I often do," and she smiled enchantingly. "You will no doubt be charmed with the great eastern cities, the magnificent churches with their lofty spires, the splendid buildings, the military encampments, such as grandmother tells me about—and for you the time will pass quickly. But I—for me, it will be the same to-morrow as it was yesterday and as it is to-day—always the same."

The two days' acquaintance with this strange yet peculiarly-fascinating girl had broadened Guy's mind, giving him a greater capacity for appreciating

true worth. In fact, his views of both life and people were undergoing complete change. With his love thoughts centered on the singular girl, surprised at the experiences she related, his mind and heart were full. Mutually they were drifting into a joyous realm on earth, seeing but dimly the silver sheen on the river as it sparkled between the trees, catching but faintly the odor of flowers in their rich profusion. As for him, he could think only of her whose eyes he likened to stars in the firmament of heaven; her hair, spun gold in the fitful light; while she was too fairy-like to be of earth, too like a vision to be real. Her influence having at once inspired him to worship, he was quite ready to mold his future life at her command. The infatuation was overwhelming and he had not the remotest idea of the passing of time. He retained a vague remembrance that she had said something of a double vision, of seeing persons floating as in silvery clouds; but he was unable to understand that hers was a super-sensitive intelligence, a singularly delicate organism that set her apart from all others; that little Luda Grey, an inexperienced young miss, possessed knowledge far beyond his comprehension, that she had been endowed with a sense of spiritism—an innate soul-love such as is granted to few—and that she was momently transmitting such love to an empty receptacle, his heart.

CHAPTER X

LUDA'S VISION

The dancers on the lawn whirled down the line, weaving in and out to a lilting melody sung by darkies accompanied by an old banjo.

"Oh, la, Jinny, my toes am soah
Dancin' on yoh sandy floah.
I'll dance dis reel an' I'll dance no moah.
Oh, la, Jinny, my toes am soah."

Someone proposed that the barn floor was preferable to the grass, whereupon the joyous frolickers deserted the lawn. Guy and Luda decided to change their positions to a bench near the wide doorway, commanding a better view; but, attempting to walk, Luda staggered and would no doubt have fallen, had he not clasped her in his arms.

Drawing her head gently to his shoulder, he realized by the sudden pallor on her face that she was fainting.

Summoned, Mrs. Grey hastened from the kitchen just as Nan unceremoniously dashed cold water in her daughter's face.

Quickly reviving, Luda protested that there was no cause for alarm, that she had merely been a bit overcome by the pain, and insisted that the dancing be resumed.

But, finding it quite satisfying to chat in pairs beneath the witchery of the peeping stars chaperoned in their journey westward by a full-grown moon, they unanimously declined.

Guy and Jack helped Luda into the house; and

leaving her reclining on the bed, returned to the lawn where Mrs. Grey with the aid of Howard slave-women served a dainty cold lunch, during which the darkies resumed their singing.

The flickering lights but intensified the blackness of their varnished-like faces and the brightness of their eyes, as in a pleasing harmony their voices rolled forth in the southern dialect, "Miss Roxy-Ann wid de Turkey-tail Fan."

In the hope that she would find Luda better, Nan returned to the house.

"How did I get in?" the girl asked, smiling at Nan's quiet tiptoeing.

"Your brother and Guy de Mai almost carried you."

"Oh, dear, how much trouble I have made! Has Mr. de Mai gone?"

"No. I think he is just outside, waiting to hear from you."

"I wish you would ask him to come in for a moment that I may thank him, and say how sorry I am for having so spoiled the evening for all—just when everybody was happy, too."

"I'm glad to see that you are better, Miss Grey. You were so white it frightened us. But your color is fine now," said Guy. And turning to Nan in congratulation, "I think you are a first-rate nurse. If I ever need one, I shall be tempted to call you in."

His gaze rested on Luda in unconcealed admiration. Such magnificent beauty he had never imagined in human.

Her lips, slightly parted, revealed two rows of pearly teeth, her cheeks were red as damask roses; and her eyes, blazing with a soulful brightness, responded to the telltale flashes in his own, indicating without doubt in his mind, a congeniality of spirit.

"I was about going, Miss Luda; but wanted to

say that I very much hope you will not suffer more, but instead, will soon entirely recover. With your consent, I shall ride over to-morrow. Perhaps I might bring you an interesting book. Reading helps to pass the time, you know."

Her eyes became suffused. He wondered why; little dreaming her so untaught that reading of books was more labor than amusement.

"Thank you very, very much, sir; but I shall be up to-morrow"; smilingly adding, "if I cannot walk, I can at least sit in the rocking-chair on the porch and count the roses."

"That would be sweetly entertaining," he replied, with an answering smile.

Encouraged by the young man's attention, Luda talked with an animation most charming, her far-South accent, dropping of her r's, etc., only enhancing the effect of her surprisingly well-chosen words.

"I must have fallen asleep and been dreaming," she said. "I heard such lovely music."

"The negroes were singing," answered Nan and Guy in chorus.

"No, no; the music I heard was quite different. I saw many people walking, driving, dancing; crowds seated at tables, laughing, and clinking glasses filled with sparkling liquid. And" curving her lips in a sort of sarcastic smile, "I too, was dancing; so you see it was a dream."

"Too bad you were able to dance in your dream-moments only, and could not join us in our enjoyable cotillions," said Guy. "But really I think you would better not talk more. It evidently excites you, heightening the fever in your cheeks."

Not heeding his caution, she continued, "But there were carriages, lawns, flowers, beautiful homes—a river, boats, hills, great cannon-balls and cannon. You were there, Mr. de Mai, in blue uni-

form, beside a floating flag," turning her eyes wistfully on him as she spoke. While his mind reverted to her assurance that he could fight and that he would be a soldier.

"This is unnatural," whispered Nan. "She is delirious."

And at once bidding them good-night, Guy departed. Outside he found only his friends, the Howard party, waiting.

The horses, restless from standing, were hard to manage. Claudia's filly bounding dangerously as Jack assisted her to the saddle. But the impetuous mounts sped quickly away, and plunging into the deep water near the crossing, were a charming picture as they stood abreast, with ears laid back in self-defense, while they quenched their thirst in the refreshing pool.

CHAPTER XI

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE

With cordial adieux to the de Mai family, coupled with the wish that they might meet again, Dr. Hamilton proceeded on his journey the following morning; but who shall say what wishes the doctor mingled with his farewell to Ruth Louns.

For an hour or more after breakfast Guy awaited an opportunity to confide his new desires in regard to West Point to his grandmother. Though that good lady had her woman at call, she sat serenely shelling peas, it being her custom to busy herself even while gleaning the countryside news as others chatted. Mornings she would go to the milk-gap to pet the cows, visit the bee-gums to learn if the bees were gathering honey or lying in the sun, if the queens were well, if there were drones among them, et cetera; then stroll down the lane making cursory examination of gardens and orchards, and, satisfied that all was well, return to her customary rocker. She exhibited keen interest in matters concerning the children, especially Guy. Realizing that life should hold something better for him than drifting, as does the average son of wealthy parents, her ardent desire was that he should adopt some profession or business career and thus rise above the level of a purposeless existence.

Finally the boy unfolded his longing. "I want to go to West Point, gran," he said. "I feel that there is something more for me than the usual easy-going life here with its monotony of daily routine."

"Well," exclaimed grandma, smiling graciously, "the old adage, 'Coming events cast their shadows before.'"

Not appreciating the force of that remark, Guy continued. "If I should approach father on the subject, he would probably not listen to me. You could always get more out of him than anyone else could. Won't you impress it upon him, Grandma, that I'll do him no discredit. I want an opportunity to prove to him that I'm worthy of our blood, and there isn't a ghost of a chance in this valley. You know it, too, don't you?" putting his arm around her. "I remember a long time since you told me about my distinguished ancestry, and I so liked to hear that story. Would you repeat it, Grandmother? I think I'm better able to appreciate it now."

"Ah, yes; and it is a history of which you may well be proud, my dear. The "de" to a name betokens special honors; and the de Mai line dates back to feudal times. You are a descendant of Francois de Mai, Comte de Paris, a Huguenot whose family left France in fourteen hundred and thirty-two, locating in Alsace. Later they went to England whence, seceding from the king, they sailed for America, taking up arms in the War of the Revolution; and in the terrible battle of King's Mountain your great-grandfather lost his life. His son, your grandfather, was a hero in the War of Eighteen-twelve; and in the Mexican War attained the rank of major-general. Your father enlisted as a private in the Mexican War, coming out of the service an officer of high degree. It pleases me that you aspire to a military career, for my son will, I'm sure, be able to secure the appointment to West Point. And he will be very happy that the spirit has moved you to desire such an education. I, too, long that you

should make a mark for yourself—though it will be lonesome when you are not here."

"Don't Grandma; or I shall cry, too. You know the water is on tap in the de Mai eye." Both laughed hysterically.

"Let us go tell your parents," said grandma. And arm in arm like lovers, they entered the sitting-room.

Overjoyed by the information, the major exclaimed, "So you intend to add your chapter to our record, my son? Well done. As I've often said to your mother, and to mine, the life of a southern planter—attractive as it is from so many standpoints—is scarcely the career for the son of a soldier; and though I did not wish to urge you, I had been hopeful that you might choose a profession in accord with the family traditions. I rejoice that my prayer has been granted while you are still free from entanglement. Experience has taught me that the brain is more receptive when the heart is undivided." Taking Guy's hand, he said feelingly, "May God prosper your undertakings, my son."

The flush that overspread the boy's countenance was interpreted by his father as indicating mingled pride and modesty. As a matter of fact he was at that moment planning to see Luda Grey, at once the cause and the end of his ambition.

"It would be better, I think, to complete arrangements immediately," the major said, "as in any case you have little time. I am promised the scholarship."

Shortly before noon Dr. Hampton called.

"Good morning, major; and you, Guy. How goes it?"

"Nicely, doctor; nicely. I'm told you were so-

journing among the Methodists yesterday—with Brother Smith's family," said the major jovially. "I fear your shell is softening. How is it, brother? Are we no longer to class you among the Baptist Hardshells?"

The doctor, flattered by the charge, pleaded guilty. "I wouldn't mind committing the indiscretion again, major. The fact is, I'm willing to be called almost any name for such an opportunity. I want to tell you that outside of rich men's homes such as yours, I have never before experienced hospitality like that of Brother Smith and his good daughter. Such wholesome cooking, such cordiality! Why, one is overpowered, and yet there is apparently not the slightest effort on their part to do anything out of the ordinary. One is just made to feel at home, and that's all there is about it."

The topic was congenial, inspiring the doctor to great volubility. He complimented Miss Nancy's mind, even pronouncing it superior to her father's; and concluded with, "She must have had a fine mother. Even girls of college training might well find it necessary to be on their guard in her presence."

Guy nodded assent, having had proof only the evening before of the doctor's every assertion, and mentally chided himself that he had not hitherto appreciated her.

"How often through superficiality one utterly fails to recognize strength and depth in others!" he mused.

Major de Mai terminated the doctor's eulogies by inviting him to dinner; and as the elder men strolled off together, Guy, smiling, said to himself, "Ah, dad, what would you have thought if you had dreamed the truth? Doubtless you are honest in

your opinion that it is not worth while trying to force book-learning into the head when the heart is overflowing with admiration—love, if you will; but I take issue with you on that point, old man. It's my belief that love stimulates ambition, broadens thought and makes for courage."

The major meantime with great pride told the pastor of his son's determination to enter the military academy, receiving in return expressions of hearty approval. The dinner-bell summoned Guy to the house just in time to overhear his old tutor's final dictum.

"The very thing, sir! Just *the* thing for a boy like Guy, who has attended strictly to his studies and has not wasted time in senseless pleasure-seeking. A mighty fine boy, major! A great head, his! Why, only a day or two ago Brother Smith and I were speaking of the high character and noble qualities of your son. One never sees him out with girls; he is studious, high-minded, conscientious, agreeable, a good listener, apt in grasping situations—yes, West Point is just the place for that boy."

Entering the dining-room unobserved by the speaker of this complimentary verdict, Guy couldn't help smiling. He wondered too, if Nan had been present when her father and Dr. Hampton discussed him. "But never mind, father dear," were his thoughts, "it's all coming right, and some day, when I make a name—if I ever do—you shall accord the praise to whom it rightfully belongs."

"Guy, old boy," said the wise man, as the young fellow took his place at the table, "this is good news I hear. Going to West Point? Well, well, your old teacher feels flattered that he has had a share in fitting you for such a career. Your birth should give you the right impulse—the son of a major,

the descendant of soldiers of both the old and the new worlds; you have a great heritage, a magnificent foundation on which to build. But, be careful, my boy, that you do not rest on that. Do not imagine that you are thereby exempt from the severity of personal training; but consider rather that because of an advantage which is yours without effort, you must endeavor all the more arduously to make your contribution to the family honor. So, go on, go on; your old preceptor will wager that you come out second to none. And some day we'll send a de Mai to Congress, mark my word."

Mrs. de Mai looked out of the window, ostensibly to watch Lila-Lilly see-sawing; but not for the twins was the deep sigh that escaped her.

"My boy going away for four years! It may be the end of his home life! It is all very well to encourage ambition in one's son; to anticipate joy in his success, but it is a death-knell to the heart of his mother."

Noticing her tear-stained eyes, Guy reproached himself that he should exult over the prospect which saddened her. He loved his father and grandmother, but "mother" was a sacred word.

"Think of the best that life affords," he would often say, "and that's mother."

The appearance of Miss Louns caused the conversation to be shifted, affording Mrs. de Mai opportunity to recover composure. After coffee they adjourned to the porch, and Pastor Hampton reverted to the Smiths.

"Ah, yes, yes, *sir!* I was indeed surprised to find what a well-read young woman Miss Nancy is. Her father, self-made too, is out of the ordinary. He never went to school a day in his life, but he's a scholar and abreast with the times."

Laden with melons, negroes came through the orchard, and knowing the doctor's especial fondness for them, Mrs. de Mai gave orders for some of the long golden muskmelons to be served on the porch. Thus the finishing feast cut short the dominie's second eulogy of the Smiths.

CHAPTER XII

THE UNFINISHED SENTENCE

The next day while the de Mai family discussed Guy's early departure, Luda, not quite so well, remained in bed; the following morning, however, her brother took her outside and made her comfortable in the shade of a sturdy mulberry-tree, adjusting a low stool under her "pet foot," now all bound with home-spun linen and poulticed with bruised peach leaves.

Unusually communicative to-day, Luda first told Jack of her dream-life, of her visits to other countries, of people with whom she was familiarly acquainted, and of Amarita, who had been a companion to her since childhood, guiding her through beautiful gardens and richly furnished castles wherein she was no stranger but at home.

"So, by day, Jack, I am your sister, but in my dream-world I am quite another person, my life one round of pleasure, my relatives and family of another sort and tongue. And stranger than all, I do not even know our parents, nor you, my own dear brother, —am even a stranger to myself as Luda Grey, you see, for my name is not the same."

Noting surprise written over his face, she implored her brother to keep her confidence sacred, especially not to acquaint her parents with her singular experiences and revelations. During the lull that followed they suddenly espied a gentleman riding at a slow pace up the road.

The girl's intuitions told her that it was Guy de Mai.

As the young man had galloped along the winding roadway bordering the river his mind too was on

the alert; it dwelt upon various themes, representing the past, present and future. The last five years,—how rapidly they had flown, and how little he had accomplished in them! The next five,—what might they not hold? But how long they loomed in the distance! The present,—ah, the glorious present was full to overflowing! So much had come to him in the golden now, especially in the days since his first visit to the drying-kilns of John Grey, whose daughter had so charmed him, so radically changed the tenor of his thoughts, his hopes, his ambitions.

He had wanted to bring her something to-day, but she had not seemed to care for books; her little home was literally buried in flowers; and in fruit the Greys could indulge to satiety. "But there is nothing better than good wishes; and here I am with my heart brimming over with them for the charming girl of the Grey cottage."

"I rode over to inquire about your sister," he remarked, cordially shaking the hand of Jack, who had hastened to open the gate. "She is better, I trust?"

"Bully. Getting on fine. Can't walk;—just hobbles around. She's sitting in the shade; see. I'll hitch your horse and we'll go to her."

Particularly vivacious, Luda was a most interesting invalid. The beauty of her face was enhanced by the ruby of her lips; her hair rolled loosely from her forehead, had a blush rose fascinatingly tucked near the pretty ear; while, half-hidden beneath the dainty skirts, encased in a sandal of red jeans, peeped the uninjured foot. The whole was a sort of revelation, enchantingly new to the boy; yet seeming to him in perfect keeping with the girl's distinctive type.

Luda did not take kindly to shoes. She had been dismayed at the idea of burdensome footwear early in life, avoiding them at all possible times, wearing only light-weight sandals which she herself pre-

pared of strong cloth, with cunningly fastened loops fitted to the great toe and straps clasped around the ankle,—an oriental intuition no doubt favoring her in designing them. Indoors, on the grass, or in the shaded woods, she delighted in discarding even these, going in bare feet. In her girlish, homespun frocks—unconsciously after the Empire—her feet covered with the prettily arranged sandals, the "wonder girl," as many called her, was as unconventional in her style as her personality and manner were superior to her environment.

Resting on one foot, Luda half rose and smiled a pretty welcome as the young man advanced.

Taking her proffered hand, he held it firmly, while remarking upon the loveliness of the day and on his pleasure at seeing her able to be out; adding that he hardly expected it,—and how quickly young ladies seemed to rally.

Her soft voice in reply, the touch of her hand, her magnetic eyes,—what you will,—penetrated him deeply, so deeply that he felt more forcibly than ever the potency of her presence, as he said to her, "The very sight of you is as refreshing as a mountain spring, little girl. And even the misfortune of your being disabled has not lessened your power of enchantment, I observe."

The unusual compliment caused Luda's face to flush. But he went on, apparently unconscious that his words had inspired it. "May I ask if the color so rapidly rising in your cheeks is the glow of renewed health, Miss Grey? Or might it be a reflection from that lovely rose, the red fading into delicate pink that is so fetchingly becoming? I thought you rather pale a moment ago. By the way, I really have some news; yet I hardly believe it will be strange news to you, since you have twice spoken of seeing me a soldier boy," and he smiled. "Is it not singular how the

whole course of one's life may suddenly turn in an entirely opposite direction! I am to be a soldier,—going to West Point, just as you predicted. How did you guess so well?"

"Guess! I didn't guess. I saw it."

"Saw it?"

"Yes. And you are going soon, very soon. Again I saw you the same soldier last night. A life of great responsibility awaits you, Mr. de Mai; there can be no doubt of that. But why the information should come to me is particularly strange, isn't it?"

"It is, Miss Grey. But do tell me something more of those marvelous dreams,—I should say, visions. For I'm awfully interested. And, too, may I not hope to have a place in your waking thoughts some time?—that you will think of me not altogether in a visionary manner?"

The subject was becoming embarrassing; and to change it, Luda spoke of Claudia Howard,—what a lovely girl she was, and incidentally of Jack's admiration for her, at the same time studying Guy's face, now seeming to her to be rather serious.

"Ah, that is a case of mutual attraction,—love, I should say; a bit romantic, perhaps, but quite noticeable in both Miss Claudia and your brother."

"Do you really think so? I imagined it was all on Jack's side."

"Not at all. I believe Miss Claudia is much interested also."

"Mother thinks she is fond of you, Mr. de Mai, and——" but realizing that she was disclosing too much, and fearing that he might consider it bordering on gossip, she hesitated.

"Well, what an idea! Why, Claudia Howard and I have grown up together. She is like a sister to me; and I'll venture she looks upon me as a big brother.

Young ladies would hardly fall in love with fellows they had known from childhood, would they?"

"That would depend," she replied, with a sparkle in her wondrous eyes.

The two youngsters were becoming more deeply submerged in a realm of enchantment themselves, and neither was able to hide the realization of it.

"I've got something to tell you,—really, no joking. I too am in love,—and with a particularly splendid little girl. Some day, I promise, you shall hear about it. It's an accidental and strange little romance of an orchard."

"Accidental, Mr. de Mai! Do you think love is ever strange or accidental?"

"Don't you?" he asked, and rose as Jack joined them. "I suppose I owe you an apology, Mr. Grey. We, your sister and I, have been discussing Claudia and yourself, and I ventured to call it a case of——"

Too frank to feign indifference, though plainly shocked, Jack looked at his sister in questioning surprise, while she and Guy both laughed. "Miss Claudia! Me! Well, the son of a poor man would hardly dare aspire quite so high; though I tell you now that I intend to be worthy of such a woman some day. Grandma tells me I'm the counterpart of Grandpa Reardon when she first met him. Who knows? I might follow in his footsteps,—be a minister. And then," looking half serious, "I would be worthy of such a girl, wouldn't I—even though I couldn't hope that one to be Miss Claudia."

"Oh, I don't know, Grey. Claudia's a girl of wonderfully good sense and womanly instincts. And you stand high in the community, which speaks mighty well for a comparative stranger," responded de Mai. "I consider a man who has determined ambitions, and whose integrity is unquestioned, the equal of any. Besides, if I loved a girl well enough to make her my

wife, I believe there could be no obstacle I would not surmount. Go ahead, old boy," placing a friendly hand on Jack's shoulder.

Luda's heart went out in gratitude to him for the encouraging words he had spoken to her brother.

Presently, turning to the girl, in a tone vibrant with an emotion he was unable to subdue, "Miss Luda, may I tell you something before I go east? Though I had determined not, I feel that it is my duty as well as pleasure—" he stopped as if to choose his words. His hesitation, however, was transient. " 'Tis true one would say my love is young, but admitting all that, it emanates from a strong heart,—a heart that beats madly for one who charmed me beyond words to explain the moment I first laid my two eyes upon her. She is to me beyond comparison. I regard her as more lovely because she is so unconscious of her transcendent beauty and natural attractions; her superior grace and loveliness. I was completely enmeshed at our first meeting and subsequent meetings have not lessened the infatuation."

"Well, I declare, if here isn't Guy!—And Luda sitting outdoors! How delightful! You are much better, aren't you, dear? How lovely!" said Nan Smith, who had suddenly emerged from a nearby clump of rosebushes. "Do you know, folks," she said roguishly, "I had a notion to eavesdrop, but thought better of it."

"I was just going," said Guy. "So now I can leave Miss Luda in the best of care." A moment's chat with Nan, and with a broken sentence on his lips, a clutch of disappointment at his heart, Guy de Mai mounted, and giving his horse rein, allowed him to gallop down the road. Each hoofbeat echoed in Luda's heart, and, forgetting her injured foot, she stood up, only to see horse and rider disappear beyond a curve.

CHAPTER XIII

"EV'RY BAR'L STAN'S ON HITS OWN END"

At Ivywild preparations for the departure of the beloved son were nearly completed. The mother winked to stop the tears that welled when the old hair-covered trunk,—a relic of her family landing in America,—was brought from the garret and packed for her boy.

His dozen woolen socks, knitted by the patient grandmother; his shirts and handkerchiefs of linen and muslin, made from flax and cotton raised on the plantation; everything indeed that the loving mother, with the assistance of the faithful black women could devise for his comfort had at last been packed; his busybody sisters even overlooking the folding of each piece in pretence of helping.

Guy was absorbed in hasty preparations and plans of travel, but did not forget to give some thought to the girl who had been the past few days the lodestar of his existence. Sunday morning found all in readiness for his departure Monday.

In the forenoon he went to the dear little church for the last time. With autumn leaves drifting everywhere, the day was dark and rainy, truly mournful. In the early morning, as he roamed about Ivywild, he had found himself in the vicinity of old Mose's cabin, where, all unseen, he had overheard a conversation that in his parting-with-home mood seriously impressed him.

"Good-mo'nin', Mose. You all gwine ter be baptizin', isn' yer?"

Mose hummed a tune and hammered away at the sole of an old shoe, altogether ignoring Dan, who

thereupon spoke in a tone of righteous indignation: "Foh de Lawd, Mose, what you all doin', poundin' away, breakin' de Sabbath like dat! Ain't yer done got no 'ligion? Marse gib de niggahs dis day off to pray to de Lawd, an' you all mendin' shoes like dere wuz'n no Lawd ter punish yer wid fiah an' brimstun! You all jis' bettah min', kase He's de nex' boss, Marse God is."

"You all jis' shet yer big mouf, Dan Smith. Reckon kase you's got no gal ter mend shoes foh,—an' hain't much at mendin' no how, shoes ner nuthin' else—you all's gwine ter talk mighty big. Ef dat gal o' mine hez ter hev dese heah shoes what de Mistis done gib her, she jis' gwine ter, dat's a fac'. Dere hain't many sich wenches roun' heah ez my black Lizy-Ann. So I'se gwine ter fix my gal's shoes *when* I sees fit an' *how* I sees fit." At the same time Mose tried to pull the handmade wooden last from the shoe, but found to his chagrin that he had nailed them fast together.

"Hi-yi, niggah!" chuckled Dan, "you's done foh. An' dat black gal won't wear dat moccasin dis day, sho' ez yoh bo'n. Dat's what ye gits fer wo'kin' on de Lawd's day."

Unnumbered beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, Mose pulled and tugged, without being able to budge the last. Black Dan ha-ha'd the louder.

"I spec' youse heerd de tex' 'bout a fren' dat sticketh closah dan a bruddah, Mosey?"

"You go on to de chu'ch, Dan Smith,—you jis' go on foh I hit yer wid dis wedge."

Mose was at his wit's end. He ran his big black hand over his moist brow, shaking the water off like drops of dew from a mist-covered bush. Still he tugged and pulled. Lizy-Ann was ready for "de meetin'," waiting only for Mose to tack to her shoe the loosened sole that the Sunday previous had flapped

with every step; but it was apparently permanently attached to Mose's last; on this day of all days when Lizy-Ann was a candidate for full membership!

He took the footgear into the cabin to show to Lizy-Ann, who in tones of indulgence said soothingly to her Mose, "Jis' you nevah min', Mosey. I'se gwine ter jine de chu'ch; an' I hain't gwine ter git maderationed; no, I is'n; kase I'se got 'ligion uv de right soht, I hez. None yer gittin' mad ner disputaden wid Dan Smith ner nobody." And she began singing, improvising both words and tune:

"De meetin' am near ginnin',
An' de singin' commencin',
An' de darkies is gedderin' frum all roun'.
Dar'll be shoutin' an' prayin',
An' de bredderin will be talkin',
Befoh us converts gits togeddah on de groun'."

Interested, Guy strolled on down toward the oak-pole meeting-house, an old cabin where the blacks worshiped with great religious fervor.

"Bruderin," said the preacher. "Bruderin an' sisterin, I riz foh you an' de Lawd, ter say dat de Judgmint Day am cummin'! An' you all mus' perpah ter jine de gr'at ahmy uv de chillun uv Izrile. De day am a-cummin' w'en de charriyot uv de Lawd will cum fer all dat love Him an' hain't 'feerd to tell it. An 'I'se tellin' yer, bruderin an' sisterin, His great ban' wagon am gwine ter pass by all dem hat hain't His chillun, an' nevah take 'em in. Some uv yer prays in secert. But, bruderin an' sisterin, dis ole niggah say ter not be shamed so ez yer feels like hidin' w'en youse prayin'. Jis' git down on yer bendin' laigs in de co'n fiel', de tater patch, in de road if yer feels dat way. Jis' so yer prays! De Good Book sez,—an' dis Good Book am right heah ter prove hit am de

truf,—dat ev'ry bar'l stan's on hits own end."

"Bottom, Bruddah Jabel," said a newcomer who had lately been brought into the neighborhood by one of the planters; "ev'ry tub do stan' on hits own bottom."

"I tell yer it makes no difference ef hit stan's on hits haid er doan' stan' at all, jis' so youse perpahed fer de great direction day. Halleluyah! Dat am de truf sho' nuff, bruderin an' sisterin. An' you-alls jis' wait an' see, an' you'll say Bruddah Jabe know'd what he wuz talkin' 'bout. An' now, dis heah bruddah am frum Ole Kaintuck, cross de river heah; an' he's gwine ter sing sumpin' dat nebbah wuz heerd in dis place befoh. An' you all mus' gib him yer undenied 'tenshun, ez de bruddah am a strangah in dis heah gyardin uv de Lawd. An' when he's dun, gib him de han' uv fellahship, too, I say."

The visiting brother arose, pulled down his homespun jacket, straightened himself proudly and swelled visibly, conscious that the eyes of every darky were upon him.

"I'se not cum 'mong you all ter preach de wohd, bruderin an' sisterin—jis' ter sing de Gospill. An' I b'lieves in singin' mighty loud 'bout dis heah Book."

Then in swelling waves of melody.

"Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' foh ter carry me
home,
Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' foh ter carry me
home.
Oh, look up yandah, what I see,
Comin' foh ter carry me home,
A band uv angels comin' arter me,
Comin' foh ter carry me home."

He got no further; the negroes, embracing each

other, began to jump and shout, praying for the chariot to come that minute and carry them to the land that flows with milk and honey.

Their earnestness made a deep impression upon Guy. The boy's mind had before dwelt on problems arising out of the ownership of human beings; and to-day he realized more clearly than ever the sins of slavery as he stood near enough to understand the entreaties of his own bond people.

"If we who own the negroes are responsible for their conformity to the moral code as we undoubtedly are for their technical conformity to the law of the land, what a fearful outlook every slave-owner has to face! I, for one, am conscientiously opposed to holding human beings in bondage." A deep sympathy filled him for those who, serving many masters—bound as they were to do the bidding of every member of their owner's family—at the same time found it incumbent upon them to be faithful to the Heavenly Master.

"Is there no way to benefit by their labor except through the institution of slavery? Is there not some way of undoing this great wrong, and yet of escaping crushing financial loss?" he queried, young as he was. As he returned to the house these and many other thoughts occupied his mind, one of which was that he could not trust himself to say good-bye to Luda Grey. He must therefore forego that promised call. Since his experience of yesterday, he was years older, realizing the imprudence of that hasty avowal, yet loving the girl no less.

Father, mother and sisters accompanied him the next day to Charleston where he was to meet the mail-coach for the Virginia capital. From Richmond he would go by train to Baltimore and at the latter place see his father's friend, a former West Pointer and now a professor, who would prepare

him for entrance to the academy. Though his departure was sudden, no detail had been omitted.

The old carryall in which the major had brought his bride home more than twenty years before, took the family to Charleston; Rush following on horseback, to serve in case of accident.

Leaving home and loved ones was not easy, and when the time for farewells arrived, Guy could have wept like a child. The presence, however, of fellow-travelers nerved him to choke back the sobs. The old mail-wagon rattled up the winding roadway; at the first turn he looked back for a last glimpse of parents and sisters, but the carryall had disappeared around the bend.

"Dear Father! dear Mother! how much they are to me! How little I have seemed to appreciate my happy home life."

Yet the thoughts that filled his heart were not alone for those at home; the sweet girl who had so recently come into his life, awakening in him a new ambition, a new interest, had her part therein. He could not conscientiously desire to bind her by a promise to wait four long years for him. She was developing into that first young womanhood too resplendently lovely to remain unsought, even unwed, especially in that valley where love-making among the young people was as natural as the flow of the Big Sandy. Some whispering love angel had impelled him to tell her of his affection for her, that it was his wish that she wait for him, be some day his own; but now, as much as he wanted her—after due consideration, after cooler judgment as to his own needs, he came to regard Nan's intrusion as highly opportune. Yet a secret longing possessed him that he would find her single on his return. And he flattered himself with the belief that Luda had learned to care for him—else why should she

see him in her dreams? He could not read her heart to discover she already loved him as some rare women love but once and forever; nor did he fully understand the meaning of the couplet:

"The moon looks down on many brooks;
The brook sees but one moon."

CHAPTER XIV

LUDA AT A MOUNTAIN WEDDING

Since Guy's departure from the Sandy Valley, Fall had merged for the second time into Winter, with little, socially speaking, to mark its transition, save now and then a neighborhood gathering. In the meantime Luda Grey had developed into a most beautiful young woman, her interesting personality becoming daily more dear to the hearts of the people.

As an excuse for a chatting visit, the day before Christmas, Claudia had called in her friends, who were busying themselves cutting and sewing strips of woolen which the negro women would weave into floor covering. Such a noisy, happy set! gossiping about this or the other fellow whom they liked or didn't like, discussing with amusing candor the faults as well as the virtues of the community—when Ned entered.

"Hello, girls! How preposterously gay you all seem! It was sort o' jolly to hear your merry voices as we drove into the barn."

"You missed a lot by not coming sooner, too," said Nan.

"Oh, I've been out in the snow all afternoon, showing the niggers how to load part of the hay without breaking the stack and leaving it exposed to the weather. I'm tired as sin, and cold and hungry to boot. Yet I want to be up to something this holiday eve, something sporty or so. I should think you-all would be mighty tired too, tacking away at those old rags. If you had any ginger in

you, I'd suggest something devilish, see?" Then he tantalizingly stopped short, while the eager girls cried out in chorus:

"What is it, Ned? Do tell us. You're right, we are tired of the house."

"Well, then, don't you-all think it would be heaps o' fun to go to a mountain wedding? Jim Ford's oldest girl is to be married; and rumor says he has torn down a partition in the house to make room for the Christmas Eve frolic and wedding-supper. And you'd like it, would you? It would be fun, sure."

"Yes, yes! I guess we would!" and six voices clamored for further particulars.

"The dance and the supper will be just the finest you ever heard of, girls; for Jim Ford's distillery brings in a big revenue, and they say he doesn't spare anything when he starts out for a high time. It's 'Heah to the crowd! Help yerselves, boys and gals; for it's Jim Ford's treat, an' free as water.'" And Ned struck an attitude.

How could we get there?" asked Claudia dubiously, knowing the country and distance.

"Sleighing," responded Ned.

"Oh, yes, yes, do!" echoed the chorus. "Capital!"

"More like sledding. I could have the horses hitched to the old wood-sled; take the bed from the big wagon; the seats from the express——"

"Oh, no—no seats, Ned," interposed one. "Fill the wagon-bed with straw and let us all pile in together. That would be the greatest fun!"

"And if you turned over, you wouldn't have so far to go. I see."

"Hunt up the bells and horns," said Nan Smith, "and we'll let the folks the whole way over know somebody's coming."

"Yes," assented Ned, "we'll blow and ring, call

the native from his hearth, and tell him Christmas is here."

"Are the horses sure-footed?" asked a timid girl.

"Sure? Sure as you're alive," answered Ned. "And full of 'go' after having been stalled all this cold spell. Besides, the snow is so cut and packed the highway is more like a tunnel than a road. Oh, it will be the greatest lark. Every moonshiner's and hunter's daughter for miles around will be there. And the way those mountaineers play a fiddle and put life into a reel makes a big show, I tell you!"

"But we haven't been invited to the wedding and we might not be welcome," suggested Luda Grey in her conservative manner. "Besides I have heard these fellows often go to a dance with pistols in their boots. I'd be afraid of them; wouldn't you, Claudia?"

"Afraid! Not I; no indeedy! I'm fond of dangerous sport."

"Ah, but they are big-hearted people, these mountaineers," declared Nan reassuringly. "They may appear rough, uncouth, and at times even dangerous, but their looks belie them. Why, they're as affable and free with everything they possess as one could wish. And to see us at their home—well, imagine! Why, those folks would consider that the greatest honor possible."

"I'm not afraid about the welcome," remarked Claudia, "but I *am* anxious about the boys. What boys can you get, Ned? Six girls! We must have as many boys, mustn't we? Say yes, girls. Don't be so modest."

"Well, Bob Whitney, for one; Jack Grey, two; Levi White, three; Charley and I make five—let's see, who else?"

"Charles is so old-fashioned and pious maybe he

won't go," observed Jenny Coates who was wont to take a dubious outlook.

"Suppose we take Joe Johnston for the sixth, just for fun," proposed Claudia.

"All right. He'll be making up to every daughter of the mountains, and we'll have him read their hands."

"The very thing!"

"Anything for a fortune!" exclaimed Nan. "Won't this be a jolly ending to a Christmas Eve carpet-rag sewing!"

"How did you happen to think of it, Ned?" queried Luda. "I am so glad, for I've never had a sleighride. In Louisiana we had little snow, you know, I'm sure I shall enjoy such a moonlight skylark.

"Don't forget to tell Napoleon to hunt up the jinglers," called Jennie, as Ned went out to have the blacks get the sled in readiness and to send messengers to notify the other boys of the anticipated sport on foot, or, more accurately, on runners.

"Will you dance?" questioned one of the merry sextette.

"Dance! Well, speaking for myself," said Claudia, "just you wait and see whether I get an invitation."

Six o'clock found, on the road to join the wedding party, the liveliest dozen young folks that ever visited a country frolic. They sang all sorts of songs, blew whistles, tooted horns, rang bells, screamed and giggled, while the four big horses drew them on at a trot up the hillside over snow and ice that had covered the earth for more than a month, the roads with their white embankments being veritable canyons. The full moon was half hidden behind snow clouds whose occasional flurries powdered the faces of the mirthful party, a real tonic to their gaiety.

They halted at Mason's only to find the camp well-nigh deserted—all gone to the wedding. This news reassured Luda, for the Mason family had great influence with the other mountain people, and so she felt less nervous as to their reception, not realizing that the very honor they conferred by their presence would bespeak the heartiest of welcomes.

When the horses had cooled, the steam arising from their wet coats lessened, the party started down the other side of the mountain, waving merry adieux to Father Mason who stood on a huge stump to see them off. Unmindful of danger they sped along, never imagining for a moment a great stone hidden under the snow would upset the sled and spill them all out. Some, however, did not altogether accept the stone theory, believing that the boys had deliberately managed the overturning. Fortunately the horses stopped; the sled partly readjusted itself; while boys and girls, scrambling in the snow, impeded by nothing more dangerous than the blankets in which they were wrapped, rolled helplessly over and down the hillside, like so many great snowballs.

More jovial than ever, the funmakers clambered into the sled, a dozen replicas of Santa Claus. Down the hill they went once more—so fast the sled almost ran ahead of the horses—finally reaching the river road; on and on, crossing the Sandy, gliding into Kentucky over firm, clear ice.

At Ford's they found horses tied or haltered, with sleds, wagons, crude vehicles of all descriptions; and the big log house fairly running over with guests. Music from a violin mingled with a voice calling quadrilles, wafted a welcome far outside the brilliantly-lighted place. Several young men

assisted the girls to alight; while others aided the boys in blanketing the steaming horses.

The front door stood hospitably open and a great log fire, bright and inviting, blazed in the chimney-place, by which the newcomers soon sat, revelling in the scene while thawing and toasting their snow-decked feet.

"La sakes, if here ain't Miss Claudia Howard, an' Miss Nan Smith too! An' all the rest!" said Mrs. Mason. "My gracious, how'd you-ens git to come?"

"Take yer shawls an' fascinators an' nubas right off," urged Mrs. Ford, shaking hands energetically and helping to remove their wraps. "My! I hedn't no idey of seein' any of you-ens! Say, Mason, look a-here; what d'yer think o' this? The folks hez come from the glen." There was hearty welcome in their hostess' voice; her expression betokened undeniable pleasure. "I jist know ye're mighty nigh plum starved to death after comin' that long ride, so git warmed up good an' come right 'long to the kitchen an' eat a bite to stay yer stummicks. I declar, my gals will be tickled near to death to think o' you bein' here."

While pressing the visitors from the glen to partake of roast wild turkey, chicken and other good things. Mrs. Ford heaped upon them her gratitude at their presence.

"I'm rale glad ye come. We didn't low to ax rich folks at all to our gal's weddin'; but we air dretful glad to hev 'em though. La sakes, folks, ye hain't eatin' a bit! Ye orter take some o' this 'ere fresh sassige, hit's mighty good—got lots o' red pepper, sage seasonin' an' sich like in't. Ford butchered jist a-purpus fur the weddin'. Do try this. La, ye're jist as welcome as ken be!"

There was a general chorus of appreciation from the party; nevertheless they hurried through, leav-

ing the well-laden table as soon as the importunities of their over-generous hostess would permit.

Their faces beaming with joy, the bride and groom danced with might and main; meanwhile, the unexpected guests seated on the edge of the bed, ingratiated themselves by keeping time to the music with their feet. The figure finished, the perspiring dancers sought the porch for a breath of fresh air, while others took their places.

A six-footer standing near the door spoke to a red-faced, horny-handed fellow beside him, "Say, Jim, lets us ax some uv them new gals ter be our pardners next. What d'yer say?" nudging the other fellow and chuckling gleefully.

From under heavy eyebrows resembling half-grown mustaches, Jim cast shy glances toward the six girls.

"Thar comes one uv their fellars now. You tell him, Jim," urged the timid six-footer. "I'd like that'n settin' on the foot o' the bed. She looks all right for a skip or two. Go on; ax him afore he goes in. Ah, go on, Jim."

"Naw. Brace up an' do it yerself," said the equally bashful Jim. "I'll stan' by ye if he sąsses ye."

"Say, Mister. You, thar! Say, that thar gal settin' foot o' the bed—she's a mighty good-lookin' gal. Kind o' friendly-like, too. Kin a fellar ax her to jine him in a reel, d'ye think? I like her face purty well."

"She is my sister," said Ned Howard, to whom the appeal had been made. "Ask for yourself. I'm sure she'll not refuse." Adding with an encouraging smile, "She's very fond of dancing."

The mountaineer walked, or rather stalked, up and was introduced. Claudia trembled with mingled fear and delight, wondering how Jack, who had not yet come into the house, would relish finding

her on the floor with a fellow of this sort. The man was a picturesque individual, his red-topped heavy boots slickly tallowed, his trousers bagging over the knees, and his blue flannel shirt set off by a cotton kerchief about the neck.

Taking his slouch, broad-brimmed hat in his hand, bowing respectfully, he asked in a surprisingly gentle tone, "Would yer mind givin' a fellar a round or two, sis? I'd like ter show yer out a bit. I'm a purty good un at it. But I'm a kind o' stranger, Jist come with Jim Wilson thar, from Raccoon Crick."

Ned could scarcely keep a straight face at Claudia's expression. Being out for a frolic, she ignored the twinkle in her brother's eye, and answered demurely, "Thank you; I shall be most happy. I may not know the dance, but I'll try; and you'll help me, won't you?"

"I sure will."

At the call, "Git yer pardners a-l-l!" the mountaineer bowed and proudly led the spirited Claudia to the center of the room. Thus encouraged, some of the others invited her friends, which caused the mountain girls to stare a bit jealously.

Luda, however, was the object of friendly curiosity, not only because she was a stranger, but also because of her charming grace and picturesque beauty, for, in the excitement of these new experiences, her great brown eyes fairly sparkled, and her complexion—set off by a rose-pink gown that gave it depth and color—could not have been more brilliant. Her friends formed a large contingent of the new quadrille, the girls dancing with mountain boys, the boys following suit with neighborhood girls.

Joe Johnston was a fitter-in, and as much at home with the mountain people as with those of the val-

ley, adapting himself to any place he might chance to be.

Among those whose curiosity led them to have their "hands read" was Ford's second daughter. Intently examining the girl's palm, the fortune-teller told her it was the "criss-crossest" one he ever did see.

"I tell you," he said, "the fellar that marries you hez got to move spry; 'cause ef he lets any grass grow under his feet you'll fly the traces. 'A wink to the wise is plenty 'nuff.' An' my old copy-book says 'Thar's no time ez good ez now.'"

At Joe's wink, the long, lank lad at Dora Ford's side, hanging with open-mouthed credulity upon every word, did not wait to hear more, but shot off like an arrow from an Indian bow to hunt the master of the house.

Meantime, Luda and Nan, declining to dance, chatted with the bride and her mother.

Mrs. Ford, overjoyed at having such intent listeners as they proved to be, grew voluble about her family. "Mina's a mighty fine gal, allus good to the other childern, an' never did give her pap nor me a sassy word, an' hit's right hard to give her up. But she's gittin' a purty good man, so she is. Now Dory hain't like her a-tall. Why, Dory's a little imp o' Satan. She don't keer for nuthin' nor nobody, fights an' 'sturbs the other childern till I'm pestered nigh onto crazy sometimes. An' Dory, she's bein' courted by a-nuthern o' the same fam'ly. An' ef ever he gits that gal, I'll stake my life on hit, he'll have his fun gitten' her to mind him. How is't a purty gal ez you air,"—turning to Luda—"hain't trottin' double-gear? Hain't often hit's the case. Now I'd say amost any o' them 'ristycrats down in the Sandy Valley mout be purty proud to tote you away from yer folks. Whar's that one that allus

rid his critter with his head in the air like ez nobody's good 'nuff fur him? Now I'd think he'd be a purty good un to ketch ef he ain't already tied up. An' I s'pose he is, fur hit hain't often that fellars with lots o' niggers an' money an' land, stays single arter they grows old 'nuff."

The approach of Ford at this instant saved Luda from further embarassing personalities. But it was not the first time during the past two years she had felt a dart in her heart at the call to memory of the man who had come into and gone out of her life so suddenly, yet held her best thoughts in his keeping since the first moment she had looked into his handsome face.

"Say, Becky, how d'ye like the idee o' Dory gittin' hitched to-night, too? Frank jist axed me. He said ez how I mout ax you. Now, what d'ye think o' that? I tole him I didn't dare ter ax her mammy; but he said I must do hit anyhow 'cause he's skeered o' wimminfolks. I says to myself, says I, 'Dory'll make him fraider ef he gits her.' "

"Sakes alive!" ejaculated the mother, "hain't that goin' purty lively—gittin' two gals off in less'n a day! Why, I do declar, there'll be nobuddy left to rock the cradle—nor pick beans nor nothin'. But I reckon they mout ez well make one job outen it."

"I tole him I thought ez how she mout jist ez well be tied up now ez anythin' elst, ef he'd git the yoke. The Squair is right heah, an'll tie 'em up quicker'n ye could say Jack Rob'son. An' I guess Frank's gone like a streak o' greased lightnin' fur the piece o' paper that makes one outen two."

Luda Grey had listened to this conversation with mixed amusement and interest. "What is the attraction," she queried, "that in all walks of life causes two people to select each other from the multitude—from the world? Is it love? And what

is love? Is it that which seems to enter the very soul, often unbidden—even at times through a heart supposed to be locked up in self? Is that love? Was it love I had for Guy de Mai—the sort which can cause a girl to forsake family, friends, position, everything?"

Luda had not only missed Guy, but she had grieved because of the unfinished something he was saying to her when Nan Smith had interrupted them that last time she saw him. She believed away down in her heart that he was about to tell her that it was herself he loved. Then too, Amarita had said he belonged to her life. Was it really foreordained? Could she conscientiously hope for a thing so impossible? For she well appreciated the fact that daughters of the poor were hardly eligible to the hearts of the rich. Yet she had met no other who had so moved her, so awakened in her such a feeling of nearness and trust—no other in whose presence her life seemed full of everything one could wish for that would enhance happiness, give peace, joy, contentment.

So, far from what one calls civilization, up on the snow-covered mountains where frost, sleet and ice clinging to the trees and glistening like jewels in the light of a cold Winter's moon stealing among the branches, made beautiful the scene from an artistic sense—amid the hilarity of a double wedding that Christmas Eve, sat Luda Grey in an uneducated, uncultured throng, yet so greatly apart from it, pondering the universal and unanswerable question, "What is love?"

CHAPTER XV

THE SHADOW LADY

During the Summer there had been so perceptible a falling-off in his congregations, that Dr. Hampton concluded it was his duty as a faithful pastor, to call on those who seemed to have lost interest, that he might if possible induce them to resume attendance. Especially did he desire to visit the Greys, for Luda, although not a member, had been particularly missed.

He found her on the lawn, beneath a sweet lilac, occupied with sewing. With the lilacs slender branches she and Jack had entwined a honeysuckle, the fragrant blossoms blending in harmonious contrast.

The girl looked worn and pale. She had appeared so for a long time; but her womanly dignity and uncommunicative nature rendered it next to impossible for people outside of her own to approach her. Smiling as the reverend doctor came near, she rose and held out her hand.

Seating himself beside her after cordial greetings, the pastor remarked upon the beauty of her retreat. "A lovers' bower, Miss Luda," he said with gentle pleasantry. "But pardon me; I came to speak of our church—its work—and to tell you how we regret your absence. We would very much like you to consider membership with us. Women have ever been a factor in good works, and they accomplish most, I think, in co-operation. It inspires me to hear your voice in our song service, for there seems to emanate from your soul—as the fragrance from these flowers—an influence for good—an in-

fluence that is peculiarly uplifting to the God-loving Christian."

As the doctor looked earnestly into the girl's eyes, the sewing dropped from her fingers, her thimble tumbled to the ground. Regaining composure, she asked herself, "Dare I open my heart to this good man? Could I make him understand the growing strangeness of my life? And can he explain to me why I should see and know to be true, much that seems but a matter of faith to many?"

"It is my one opportunity. I will make the effort." With the resolve came the needed strength.

"You speak of our help in church work, doctor—but I myself need help, such help as I am sure you could give me if I might confide in you—tell you——"

"Do, child; for if I can be of service to you who, we all claim, have in some way been blessed above the average mortal, I shall do so with all my heart and prayers."

Her Madonna face grew paler, even marble-like, as she lowered her gaze, and after a moment's hesitation, said in voice earnest, hopeful, subdued, "I have been very happy among your kindly people—but I have withal many experiences that cause me deep thought, sometimes perhaps fear—experiences wherein as time goes on I am brought to mingle more and more with another people—a different people—apparently in other countries and from other worlds," she added this as if in response to the exhibited surprise from which the minister, at words of such enigmatical import, could not refrain.

"Until warned by my grandfather that it was well not to speak of such things, and that it was merely a fancy of my own, I was not aware that everyone did not have the same. One evening last Winter,

when mother had gone to church, and Grandmother sat comfortably rocking in her pet corner, I was seized with a severe headache; and recalling that hops were soothing to the nerves, I filled a pillow-cover with some and lying down temporarily on Grandma's bed near the fire, placed them under my head. Their aroma quieted me and I must have fallen asleep, when a shadow lady who says she is ever with me, laid her hand upon my brow, and together we approached the river, over which we floated without effort. The pebbled shore glittered with frost crystals, and the beautiful stars gleamed. We entered the church. You were in the pulpit. Candace Melville, whose mother died last Fall, you know, knelt with the others at the altar rail, the misty form of a woman in flowing robes of white hovering over her. Following her eyes as they turned toward the pulpit, I descried behind you a great archway with somber draperies falling to the floor. The bright one, whom I recognized as the spirit mother of Candace, glided noiselessly past you. Triumphantly drawing aside the pall-like hangings she disclosed a massive golden cross, in the glory of which the upturned face of the motherless girl became suddenly irradiated."

"In your sermon you spoke of those long since gone to their reward—those who dwelt in this valley when it abounded with uncivilized Indians and ferocious wild animals—those heroes who had lived and worshipped here, built the little church and upborne the cross. They were there, assembled around you, doctor. As you pronounced the benediction, I saw them depart. Then, over a great golden highway, on a floating wave of brilliancy, Amarita bore me away to an arena into which came numerous other paths. A massive gate surmounted with colossal arches and spiral bars on which burned

lights of transcendent brightness, swung back, permitting us to enter. Scintilating pebbles glistened under our feet; silvery fountains flashed in the midst of lakes; and everywhere flowers, ferns, vines and shaded nooks, surrounded buildings of pellucid whiteness. Beneath the central crystal dome of a spacious palace we beheld portals of other palaces."

"'In my Father's house are many mansions,'" quoted Dr. Hampton in reverent tones.

"An innumerable white-robed throng, chanting and bearing lighted candles, ascended broad amethystine stairs," continued the girl. "Suddenly, heavenly music melted away, darkness encompassed us and we were alone in infinite space. In unspeakable fear I wanted to plead with Amarita to take me home, but could not voice my longing. Returning from the evening service, my mother—attributing to the hops my apparently breathless sleep—called me."

As Luda's voice grew faint, dying away on the flower-scented breeze, raising her great eyes, she looked for a moment into the face of the doctor who slowly loosened his clasp of her hand, his mission forgotten. A man of great intellect, a student, he fully realized that it was not in the character of a simply-bred country girl she had spoken, her language as well as its import convincing him that such knowledge could scarcely have been acquired by other than deep experience, or more properly judging it, that she spoke by inspiration.

And this was the secret of her subtle influence upon all with whom she came in contact. That which had made her become a cause of wonder, he now quite understood as coming from a higher source than mortal man could fathom.

"Then too, doctor, I do not forget the lessons I learn, nor the people I meet. In my travels, guided

by this beautiful creature through mists of the clouds, I have visited worlds of darkness, have conversed with him whom we call Evil, have passed into, through and out of his domain, sat on his satanic throne, heard his flattering, soft voice, have witnessed the redemption of souls who, having paid the penalty for sin, pass a second gate into the Gardens of Paradise. I want so much to understand why all these varied experiences should come to me—which I am sure ofttimes cause me to be misunderstood. Sometimes I seem not to belong to earth, have no abiding home, since each and all people with whom I mingle and all places seem natural and familiar to me."

"No doubt, Miss Grey, this marvelous insight—or inspiration I would rather call it, this gift of glorious journeyings in unconscious moments—is designed to prepare you for some special work, and when, as the depleted nerves rest in what we term sleep, the sub-conscious or untiring mind is more alert and with the sight born of the never-dying spirit you are enabled to delve into worlds and matters unseen by natural vision. God sends out His agents, first preparing them for the call," said the minister. "But we do not know where or upon whom He places His holiest raiment."

"The shadow lady tells me it is to prepare me for my heritage, my own. What that heritage may be has not been disclosed. At times I seem to look back, vainly try to remove from my vision a misty something which shuts me out of a former existence; then I half penetrate a new life, also just out of my reach, being opposed or excluded from the glimmering light by cloudlike mists before my eyes, and which, though appearing so easy to pass through, are immovable; and even while strain-

ing my half-visioned eyes they seem no less impenetrable."

"Thus, in this life, you partake of two others, Miss Grey—mingle with people of an existence gone by, endeavor to obtain an insight into things which must have been former experiences, and see just in advance of you that home wherein the great light shines on the life eternal. 'Great is the mystery of Godliness,'" he said slowly, conscious that he had responded to her wonderful narrative in terms new to himself.

Thanking the girl for the confidence vouchsafed, adding that he regarded it as one of the most marvelous revelations with which he had ever been blessed, and bidding her good-bye, Dr. Hampton retired from her presence in serious thought. The little country miss had opened up to his highly intellectual mind a theme quite new to him, the knowledge of which he had not sought nor hoped to fathom. She had revealed to him brilliancy of intellect, astounded him with strange knowledge and deep spirituality, and yet he knew her to be lacking in even the rudiments of a school education! Though he was called preacher, Luda Grey was a teacher, and to her superior wisdom he owed a new inspiration—a new faith—a belief that all who live to-day, have lived before, will live again, and forever.



NATHALIE, THE FAIREST FLOWER OF ALL

Chap. XVI.

CHAPTER XVI

GUY ENGAGED TO NATHALIE DOWNING

Passing through his first term at West Point, Guy de Mai had found no difficulty in falling in line with strict discipline and obedience to rules. His roommate, Billy Downing, was the son of a prominent judge in Baltimore; and comradeship between the two cadets saved them both many a homesick hour. Later the acquaintance ripened into a friendship which was to extend through life. Each had written home in glowing terms of the other; and when finally the time arrived for their first year's furlough they obtained permission to travel around together, see something of New York, Philadelphia and other northern cities; the latter days of the leave being spent in Baltimore at the home of Billy's parents, who recognizing Guy's qualities, were charmed with their son's friend. He soon became a prime favorite with the entire Downing family, which included an only daughter, Nathalie—exceedingly pretty, but of delicate appearance.

The vacation of the second year they spent together in the Adirondacks; and that of the third in the Thousand Islands and Canada.

During his last Winter at college, Judge and Mrs. Downing, with their daughter, now eighteen, visited their son. The fragile girl of three years before had developed into an exquisitely beautiful young woman of flower-like type, with a wonderfully translucent complexion as delicately tinted as a rose. Officers as well as cadets were at once attracted to the southern beauty, and the gale of popularity caught Guy de Mai in its swirl. Though he

worked conscientiously and hard to finish his course and to do so unhampered, he too fell in love with Miss Downing, who became to him as to many others at the academy, the most desirable and adorable of girls. But he manfully resented the idea of anyone else superseding him in her regard, assuming that by reason of longer acquaintance, and his friendship with her brother, he was quite entitled to first claim upon her time; besides, her parents as well as Billy encouraged the seeming attachment. Guy's years at West Point had been so filled with active work and hard study as to give him little time for dwelling on the past, hence he had gotten over his one-time interest in little Luda Grey—or rather, looked back upon it as merely a boy's romantic infatuation for a pretty girl.

The Downings were people of position and wealth; and it was a well-known fact that both of Guy's grandfathers had been gentlemen of the old regime, patriotic soldiers in the War of the Revolution, and had been among the first to cross the Kanawha. So aside from their predilection for the young Virginian, Nathalie's parents would be well pleased to receive him as a suitor for her hand.

The young people danced, went sleigh-riding and skating in the moonlight, and as naturally as could be, Guy de Mai and Nathalie Downing drifted into love-making.

One evening at a ball given in her honor, screened in a deep window embrasure admiring some exquisite chrysanthemums, yielding to the fascination of the moment he confessed his love.

"You are irresistible, Nathalie dear—the fairest flower of all, and it is not strange you should have captured all hearts at West Point."

"All?" she echoed archly, plucking at the flowers, without raising her head.

"Yes, *all*. You have certainly made a conquest of mine," he said, putting his arm around her waist and kissing her crimsoned cheek.

On his part it may have been the intoxication of the music, propinquity, or infatuation. To her it was first love, the unsealing of a girl's pure heart. His words meant a declaration; and repeating them to her mother, she asked consent to an engagement.

Before Guy de Mai fairly realized it he found himself definitely bound. He was joyously proud when congratulations were showered upon him, yet conscience-smitten in that he had not shown proper consideration for his parents by first asking their approval.

CHAPTER XVII

NATHALIE AT IVYWILD

Although Major and Mrs. de Mai acknowledged surprise at their son's hasty action, an invitation was at once sent for Nathalie to visit Ivywild, where, accompanied by Susan and Erastus, slaves of the family, she arrived in April, intending to remain until after the home-coming of Guy who would finish his military course in June. He had written enthusiastically of his bride-elect, yet his parents, all, were agreeably disappointed. Her beauty, so ethereal, so unlike that of the wholesome country-bred girls of western Virginia, charmed them. And Nathalie was enchanted with Ivywild and its lovely surroundings, going daily with Lila and Lily on delightful rambles for flowers down the valley or up the mountainside. She was lulled to restfulness by the cooing Virginia night-birds, the rustling trees in the shadowed valley. To one reared in the city as she had been, all this was peculiarly attractive. Then, too, her new friends had at once taken her to their hearts. The servants vied with each other for the honor of waiting upon her, robbing her own slaves of their charge. The old cook fairly outdid herself inventing delicacies to tempt her appetite, and Guy's man, Rush, swung the hammock in the sun that she might lose some of her pallor.

Much curiosity was aroused when it became generally known throughout the country that Guy de Mai's intended wife was visiting Ivywild. Miss Howard, among the first to call, invited Luda Grey to accompany her. Claudia had daily become more and more attached to Jack's sister. Neither of the

girls had, however, confided to the other any inkling of a love affair; Claudia attempting at all times to hide her feeling for Jack deep down in her own heart; and though Luda cared for Guy, she would hardly confess it to herself. She had heard of his engagement, and when asked to make the call, gave no sign of the heart-pain it caused her.

The de Mai plantation embraced more than a thousand acres reaching up and down the valley where the Big Sandy lazily flowed between the mountains and hills covered with virgin forest. As the two neared the house with its spacious lawn and spreading trees, Luda felt most keenly the distance between herself and Guy, and she tried with all her innate womanliness to realize that he could never have been more to her than friend. Yet "He belongs to your life and you belong to his; your lives are being drawn together for all eternity," forced itself upon her with its significance enshrouded in blackness.

Nathalie received the callers in a manner that fascinated them. And she was equally pleased—especially with Luda whom she later described as a dreamy-eyed mountain maid with the softest, sweetest voice and wonderfully acute intelligence, of whom she grew more fond each time she saw her; and Luda was filled with a strangely inexplicable tenderness for the entrancingly beautiful city girl, with never a suggestion of bitterness toward her, although she had won the love of Guy de Mai, the man she herself adored.

Letters to Nathalie came regularly from West Point, while a daily *billet-doux* of daintily-tinted paper made its way across the mountains in reply. Though Bepo still drove the old coach from Richmond, conveying mail to out-of-way post-offices, trains to Parkersburg connecting with boats down

the Ohio had greatly improved mail facilities during the last four years; so Nathalie was able to communicate with her loved one in a most satisfactory manner. She told him of everyone's kindness to her, and of her delight at finding minds of such rare development—referring especially to his former tutor, Dr. Hampton.

Though latterly not well, she was determined to hide all appearance of ill-health, refraining from any allusion to it, assuming that she suffered but a temporary indisposition and that her fatigue when walking or entering into games with the girls was attributable to her sedentary life. In truth, she did not want to believe herself physically unfit for any form of entertainment planned for her pleasure.

CHAPTER XVIII

GUY'S UNEXPECTED RETURN

One afternoon early in July, as the sun slowly sank behind the mountain casting cool shadows over Ivywild, a neighbor's wagon stopped at the gate. A stranger—a tall, handsome gentleman in uniform, alighted and walked rapidly up the path leading to the house. From behind the wisteria-twined lattice there crept an old brindle dog; as, writhing and jumping good-naturedly, it sprang toward him, there was a general hastening to the porch.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, I believe it's brother Guy!" cried the twins in one voice, clapping their hands joyfully and starting on a run to meet him.

For a pleasant surprise, Guy had come a couple of days ahead of date; but his own surprise was greater, inasmuch as he could scarcely realize that the two girls flying down the path were his sisters. Somehow he had been thinking of them as the little maids in pinafores he had left four years before. But here they were, full-fledged grown-ups in long dresses.

"What! my sisters? Impossible! Pray tell me which is which, Miss Lila-Lily or Miss Lily-Lila."

Peals of merry laughter boding ill for his peace of mind greeted this speech. The twins, perfect likenesses, had invariably worn ribbons of different shades to aid their friends in distinguishing them. They did not, however, always stand by their colors.

After the most loving welcome from parents and sisters, Guy asked, "Where are grandmother and Nathalie?"

"In the garden," answered his mother.

"Together?—Don't say a word; I'll slip out and surprise them."

He met them coming through the wide hallway, arm in arm—the two who in such different ways were so much to him—and fondly drew them together to his breast.

When Ruth Louns joined the group Guy congratulated her most heartily on having turned out such a pair of stunning creatures as his saucy sisters. Having discharged her duties most conscientiously, and her pupils no longer requiring her services, Ruth was about to return to her Kentucky home.

Old black Mammy hastened to put additional touches to the supper, for nothing could be too good for her "honey boy." On the mantel over the big, open fireplace in the old-fashioned dining-room stood two handsome crystal-fringed candelabra with brightly-burning home-made candles. The table groaned under its load of delicious edibles in the midst of which a third candelabrum was half hid between crystal bowls filled with wild violets.

Guy paused a moment on the threshhold. "Doesn't it look good—jolly good! It's nice to be home—and with you, dear," taking Nathalie's hand.

His cadet uniform proved an irresistible attraction to the pickaninnies who, from various points of vantage in range with the door, peered at "young Marse" as he sat at supper; their kinky wool plaited taut and tied with white strings seeming to force wider open their rolling eyes as they took turns in peeking at him and dodging back under the bushes.

Guy's evident pleasure in everything about his home was delightful. And he was just as happy in relating his success at West Point, proudly displaying his beautifully-engraved diploma, not forgetting

to mention the worthy professors who lauded him in their specific congratulations on his wonderful achievement and promise in future military affairs. While the twins hovered around their brother like honey-bees after goodies, Nathalie sat quietly by in a sort of blissful serenity until the grandfather clock rang out the midnight hour.

CHAPTER XIX

ARCADIA THE BEST!

Turning on his pillow next morning, Guy looked longingly out of the window upon the silvery waters of the Big Sandy flowing on in the same old way.

"How peaceful! The loveliest spot on earth! What a change! One may sleep as long as he wishes—no reveille here—no call to drill. While fully appreciating the advantages of military life—after all, 'There's no place like home.'"

Glancing around the room he noted the care with which Rush had put his dressing-case in order, and placed upon the table below the old-time mirror, his razor and shaving-mug. He had scarcely needed such accessories when he went away; but now, on catching his reflection in the glass, a very stubby beard of three days' growth met his vision. "How unkempt I must have looked last night."

He turned again toward the window that framed his view of the valley, the picture embracing the adjacent orchards and meadows; the flax fields and growing cotton; the rippling river and the mountain "scarfed with green." The freshness of early morning was over all.

"Arcadia, the blest!" he murmured.

The breath of roses swept through the room and with it came a thought of Nathalie in her flower-like beauty. He wondered how she would endure the Winter in a country with open fire-places, accustomed as she was to the heating devices of a city. He could scarcely define his feeling toward the girl who was so soon to become his wife. He

was proud of her unusual beauty, her intellectual attainments; admired and appreciated her character; longed to protect her; and yet he was conscious that something was lacking—that his love fell short of the ideal, of that complete devotion with which she too evidently regarded him. Reluctantly he admitted to himself a blind fear that he did not adequately return the devotion of his betrothed.

A light step at the door—Rush peeped in; but his master was as little inclined to rise as he had been at the earlier call. The fact was Guy had been so long under discipline he greatly enjoyed an opportunity to indulge himself. Turning, he caught sight of a couple of kinky heads in an apple-tree near his window.

"He hain't dun got 'em on now," announced a pickaninny.

"Get away from there, you black niggers! Go, I tell you."

The wiry bodies disappeared in a twinkling, making their descent on the opposite side of the tree. Guy laughed good-naturedly. Rush was in the room in an instant, his faithful old heart rejoicing at the return of his beloved master whose special servant he had been from infancy.

Rush was a chronic whistler, his face always in a pucker. It was his delight to give, soft and flute-like, the strains of some plantation melody, or an imitation of the mocking-bird.

Amid the cheery harmony Guy moved lazily in bed while Rush busied himself in arranging the toilet accessories—details which the young West Pointer had for the past few years been compelled to attend himself. It was such a comfort to be waited on once more; he reveled in it. Finally, with a groan of resignation, he rose and, after making his ablutions, seated himself for a shave. He

interrupted the strains of "Oh, Dem Golden Slippahs" with "Tell me all that has happened, Rush—about the Howard boys, and their sister. She isn't married yet? No? Does she ride horseback as much as ever?"

"Miss Claudia's single yit, Marse Guy. She dun 'fused evehbody 'roun' heah till folks think she sho' do like dat po' white trash, de fruit-dryer's son."

"Jack Grey, eh? Well, he isn't a bad lot. How about his sister, Miss Grey? She's married, I suppose?"

"Oh, her? Same as eveh. Mighty purty gal. Dey say Jack's all right 'ceptin he's po' white trash. Den he's bin a studyin' all by hisself, larnin' so he kin be a lawyah, or a doctah, or sumpin'."

"Is it possible! Well, I'm very glad. That's really commendable in Jack. He's no ignoramus. And his sister was a very pretty girl as I remember her—and still single, eh? And how about the Whitneys?"

Rush manipulated the razor as though he had shaved his master but yesterday, emitting meanwhile a cadence of bird-notes, rapid or slow, according as he wielded the razor with confidence or caution.

"De Whitneys all done give up livin' on de plantation kaze Marse Bob likes hit bes' in town. An' de niggahs all down in de mouf kaze dey's to be selled way down Souf."

As this was scarcely a subject for discussion between master and slave, Guy remarked, "Never mind, Rush. I don't care to talk about the sale. I want to get downstairs some time to-day. The Howard boys—what of them?"

"Oh, dey's all right. Marse Ned he's shinin' up to Miss Lila-Lily. An' Marse Cha'les done gone

off to study fo' to be a preacher. Dey say as how he'll be a mighty good 'un, too."

"Hurry up, now," exclaimed the master, on hearing the latest breakfast bell and seeming not to realize that his own questions were causing the delay. "They'll be waiting for me, and you're just fooling away my time."

With complete composure, Rush daubed on more lather to the plaintive strains of "Kitty Wells."

"Marse Guy, you sho' is got a heap sight mo' bea'd den when you lef' fo' de Wes' Pint; I jist use to lay on de latheh an' wipe hit off wid de brush agin an' den pass de razah's back down yo' face less'n de bea'd kum in wiry an' stiff if I shaves you when hit's sproutin'—an' you nevah know'd no differ'nce. Heah's yo' seal-skin ring, suh," as he was at last ready to go downstairs.

Guy took the seal ring he had removed when bathing, and replaced it on his little finger. It was his birthstone, an agate, and bore the de Mai arms. His mother had given it to him on his fourteenth birthday. How well he remembered her words: "He who bears a shield of azure—which is typical of the skies, of lofty deeds and thoughts—must be vigilant. This tree signifies vigor, strength, energy. The crest, lillies-of-the-valley rising from a crown, betokens that he to whom the arms were granted was of royal descent; also that his life was marked by humility and purity. While the motto, 'Noblesse oblige,' is intended to teach that noble birth carries with it the obligation to be noble under any and all circumstances."

CHAPTER XX

MEDOC'S WELCOME

When finally Guy entered the dining-room he found that the family—glad he was resting—had breakfasted without him; but black Mammy was deftly arranging the delicate china, and adjusting a profusion of fresh flowers gathered expressly for "her boy," whose home-coming had been scarcely less sweet to her than to his mother. Black Mammy, who loved him with her whole heart, met him with outstretched arms. The greeting was typical of that unique relationship, that bond of affection, between master and slave, the existence of which few who lived in non-slave states could appreciate or may not even have known; else sweeping assertions as to the cruelty of masters would not have been made. That there were some cruel ones could not be denied.

After ample justice to the breakfast, Guy joined the family in the large morning-room overlooking the road.

"Why, Mother," he exclaimed, putting his arm around Mrs. de Mai who was attired in a becoming gray silk poplin, "you're the youngest girl in the room."

They drove away to church, leaving Guy standing on the porch under the morning-glory vines that hung in festoons from hoop and trellis, the green of the heart-shaped leaves commingling with the multi-colored mass of dew-bespangled bells. Catching sight of Susan crossing the lawn, he asked after her mistress.

"Miss Nathalie she tooken her coffee in de bed.

Missy de Mai say she better res' mo'nins, she cough so bad in de nights."

"Why, I did not know that your mistress had a cough."

"Yes suh, Marse de Mai, Miss Nathalie do cough right smaht."

Something in the woman's manner struck an indefinable chill to his heart, though he was too inexperienced to imagine the cough due to a deeper cause than a cold; and it was quite the custom for southern girls to rise late.

"Poor little Nathalie, I must be careful of her for she is not strong," he said to himself, as he picked a sprig of sweet basil.

Lorenzo came up from the servants' quarters, and swung the gate open to let his young master pass.

"We's powerful glad to see you agin, Marse Guy. I reckon things look kin' o' nat'ral, suh?"

"You have improved the fences and taken care of the lawn—and I notice that the elm and maple-trees have been newly trimmed. How about the horses? Same lot?"

"You know, Marse Guy, dat hosses an' sich like ages mo' quicker den folks. I's gittin' ole myself, an' cain't git roun' so ve'y spry sence I runned a rusty nail in my foot. I jis' wo'k when I feels good. I kyard a heap o' wool for de women-folks. I reckon I won't wo'k much mo', suh."

Lorenzo's plaint struck the keynote of thoughts that had been in Guy's mind for some time, especially since he had heard among the cadets and officers at West Point considerable discussion of the political aspect of the problem of slavery which was being agitated by writers and speakers of the day. He wondered what would happen to old Lorenzo and thousands like him if the slaves should

be given their freedom. Could they provide for themselves? The younger ones, yes, possibly, but he feared the old ones could not.

Pondering the subject, he walked to the stables where magnificent Medoc uttered a whinney of welcome that so went to Guy's heart as he smoothed the glossy coat he could scarcely keep his eyes dry.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WAR CLOUD

Returning to the house after his short morning ramble, Guy found his grandmother alone in the sitting-room, her hands folded over a dainty handkerchief which lay on an open Bible in her lap.

"Now, honey, as our little Nathalie seldom comes down before noon, we can talk."

"Yes, grandma."

"I'm anxious, dear, to know what you think of the possibility of war between the states. Can it be true that there is such bitter feeling in the North against us? You know your father takes the New York papers and the *Cincinnati Tribune,* all of which have lately been publishing rather hard things about us slave holders. In your opinion, is war probable?"

"If I'm not mistaken there'll be high feeling at the presidential election next Fall, grandma; still, I would hardly like to predict anything quite so serious as war. The nation, especially the South, is prosperous; and, to my mind, there is no legitimate cause for war. The question of slavery should be settled in a wiser way. Personally I confess I am not in favor of it. So long as it is continued, our country is undeserving of the title, 'The Land of the Free.' "

"There is considerable feeling here against your father."

"Against father! I cannot imagine such a thing."

"Yes, the slave-dealing people think he is too considerate and lenient toward his negroes. Whenever there has been any serious outbreak between

overseers and rebellious slaves, we hear of accusations by the hard masters against men like your father. But for such men, they say, they would have less trouble in managing their slaves."

"How unjust!"

"Keeny, the driver on the Whitney plantation, is the most brutal, the most heartless of men," his grandmother continued. "Colonel Whitney and his son have been living in Baltimore, leaving Keeny in absolute charge. Besides whipping mercilessly, he is always selling off the weak or aged negroes and buying strong ones in their places."

"Well, that may be good business."

"Yes; but you know your father would consider such a course inhuman."

"Yes, father is incapable of a mean action."

"He has absolutely no traffic in slaves. He is too noble for such business."

"Our blacks are contented and happy, are they not?"

"Oh, yes."

Then she waxed as righteously indignant over the situation of the slaves as she had over the bitter attacks made by northern papers against slave-holders.

"Well, we must hope for the best," said Guy. "But now, grandma, let us speak of Nathalie. I am surprised to learn that she has a cough."

"I fear she is far from well, my dear."

"She was always delicate in appearance, grandma; but that is due, I think, to the pearly transparency of her complexion. Yet, this climate may not agree with her, for you know she is accustomed to the seashore and salt air. I believe it would be well to hurry our wedding and take her back to Baltimore. We did not expect, however, to be married before

late Autumn. But whatever is best for the dear girl must be considered first."

"This mountain air is better for her trouble than salt air, dear. So I have been thinking it a good plan to ask her people to visit us this Summer. And, honey, I do wish you would not hasten your marriage."

"You alarm me, grandma. You don't think Nathalie's lungs are affected, do you? Why, she was so happy last night, and looked so well! I was more proud of her than ever."

A knock at the door, and Susan appeared with a message from her mistress—"she was feeling quite well, and would be glad if they would come up." In silent sympathy, each with a great bunch of fragrant roses, Guy and his grandmother, joined Nathalie in her cozy room.

"It is so delightful here," she said by way of greeting, "I wanted you to enjoy it with me."

"So you feel better this morning, dearie?" said grandma, tenderly kissing her fair brow.

"Very much, indeed, thank you. Only I fear I'm indulging myself unduly and allowing you all to spoil me."

Guy stood transfixed, shocked at the signs of illness in his fiancée. By the fitful candlelight the night before, he had not realized the truth; now, all the filmy lace with which her dress was draped, could not hide the evidence. The little hand was almost transparent. "Oh God," he thought, "it is only a little over two months since she left me in New York, and such a change!"

A cluster of wild roses was fastened to her corsage, and it seemed to him that the beautiful, fragile blossoms were typical of the girl herself. He felt choking in his throat and turned ashen. Grandma, tactfully remarking on the merits of a

new book, engaged Nathalie's attention until he recovered.

When he spoke of how sweet she looked with the flowers, Nathalie told him they were "the gift of a new little friend, beautiful Luda Grey."

The phrase caused a little prick at his heart, reminding him of a time when he too said "beautiful Luda Grey," but apparently ignoring the reference to Miss Grey, he declared to Nathalie that he did not blame her for not wanting to leave her pleasant room, adding, "But after all, it is the occupant that lends the charm, even putting the roses to blush." And making himself comfortable, Guy spent the morning amusing her with West Point gossip, of the people she had met while there, and all the latest news he thought might please her. She smiled sweetly, appearing intensely interested, but talked little herself.

Grandma had excused herself as the family had returned from church, bringing with them two of the ministers.

In the afternoon, Ned and Claudia called. Claudia had grown somewhat taller, her old-time lightness having given place to a new dignity. But in ten minutes, under the stimulus of Guy's teasing, they were chatting like blackbirds. More ethereal-looking than ever, Nathalie, who later came down wrapped in a white shawl, sat sheltered from the breeze. It amused Guy to see the devotion Ned showed for his sister. Ned had since boyhood loved Lila, and imagined with the perception born of love he alone—of all except her mother—could distinguish her from her duplicate sister. The girls sometimes mischievously exchanged bows—their marks of identity—much to Ned's chagrin; for Lily would insist that *he* had been the *beau* exchanged, which fact she could prove if she were unkind

enough to disclose certain confidences intended only for the ear of Lila.

Soon after dinner a man rode up with the report that the head overseer of the Moore plantation had been shot from ambush on the bank of the river. The information startled all—the eyes of Guy and his grandmother meeting in secret misgivings. The two preachers seized the occasion for making long prayers wherein they told the Lord exactly what to do in the premises.

Guy and his sisters, excusing themselves, accompanied Claudia and Ned to the gate; and Major de Mai found Nathalie alone, her eyes wistfully following them.

"Dear, dear major, how good of you to come, for you are just the one I wanted most to see. I want to speak with you a moment."

"As you like, dear," and he sat down beside her.

"I hope you will not think me foolish, but—I wish—" and she hesitated.

"Tis already granted, lady fair, even to the half of my kingdom."

"You know I—I—am not well, major dear; but don't you think I would be able to make the trip home soon—say before the war breaks out?"

"Why, my dear child, there is going to be no war. You must not be frightened by rumors. It is but natural you should be a little homesick, and want to see your parents and brother; and we have been planning a little surprise for you. Mother has been talking with my wife and me of how pleasant it would be to have your family visit us; and a letter expressing our desire in the matter has been written and will go in the morning's mail. Now, what more can I do for my little queen?"

"Nothing, oh, nothing," grasping his hand. "You are so good that I must cry—just a little." She

struggled vainly against the inclination. "Oh, these are tears of joy, you know."

"Tears that will vanish like dew in the sunshine," he said, gallantly kissing her finger tips; adding, as Guy came up the path, "Here comes the sunshine."

Any woman who could muster a tear could wind the major around her finger, so he petted Nathalie, calling her his dear little daughter, and by the time Guy joined them, they were both in smiles.

Wearied by the day's excitement, she retired rather earlier than usual; but when sleep—retarded by the very cause she had hoped might induce it—did not come, she arose and stood by the window a long time taking in the beauty of the night. The full moon, a huge golden globe, seemingly suspended by invisible chains far below the clear sky, scintillated weird brightness between the broad, quivering leaves of the trees, casting lace-like shadows over the lawn. All about was serene, mellow grandeur. And she murmured, "How sweet to live—how glorious to die—in this peaceful valley of the Big Sandy.

CHAPTER XXII

LET THE ENSLAVED BE FREE

Guy did not spend a single moment in his luxurious bed the next morning, for not only was he apprehensive as to Nathalie's health, but the talk with his grandmother as to the feeling against his father as well as the causes which led to it, filled his mind with dark forebodings and made him almost oblivious for the time even to the comforts of his beloved home.

Before Rush imagined him awake, he had dressed and gone downstairs, much to the chagrin of that faithful servant. He had quite forgotten he was no longer at the barracks, he said, thus consoling Rush, by whom he sent fresh cut roses to Nathalie with enquiries and good wishes.

His father and mother seemed to share his preoccupation during the morning meal, Miss Louns alone being bright and cheery. But then, she was going home, and an hour later the family gathered at the gate to see her off in the old carryall in charge of Lorenzo. With many tears and promises not to forget, Claudia and her pupils separated that fair July morning; but she took with her from Ivywild as a sweet benison grandma's "God be with you."

"I believe your father is going down to the flax fields, Guy," said his grandmother. "Would it not be a good opportunity for a talk with him?"

"Capital. I'll overtake him."

He linked his arm in that of his father and they walked for some distance in silence. Moved by a

common impulse, both stopped to gaze upon the blue water of the Sandy flowing lazily on.

"How delightful," observed the father, "to watch the changes the seasons bring, the passing, day by day, into other phases—the growing corn, the ripening fruit—I often spend an hour loitering along this path."

They stood upon the roots of a spreading beech that reached over deep pools, the banks having been undermined by Spring freshets. In the clear water below them darted catfish, perch and other species peculiar to the stream. The distant low of cattle blended with the madrigal of the birds, the breezes rustled the boughs of the tree, and all nature was attuned to harmony.

"This spot brings to mind a dream I had last night—one I cannot help feeling is not without significance, but I hope you will not think me a victim of superstition, father."

"By no means, my son, for I, myself, cannot deny that there have been in the past both dreams and visions sent for special purposes."

"In this dream I seemed to be watching the lights in the sky, when I saw in the distance a murky cloud, gaining in volume as it rolled toward me. Presently, as the blackness dissipated, a woman appeared, the cloud resolving itself into a mantle of beautiful hair bound at her forehead by a circlet of stars. 'I am sent, sir, by the Master,' she said, 'and bid you repeat to men His will. None created in His image shall be held in bondage. You, with many others, are destined to lead a mighty host leaving ruin and desolation in its wake; but, as were the devastations of former days, it is to uphold my Master's promise—to manifest His will toward men. Let the enslaved be free!' She arose and sailed away on wings like a great white bird."

"A vision, a wonderful vision, my son, sent perhaps to strengthen a desire which I have long hoped to carry out, but which, for many reasons, I had not the courage to attempt, one being my fear that you would think me quixotic. In my own mind I am convinced that it is wrong to enslave human beings. It has been my wish to free my blacks, and perhaps leave the Sandy Valley; but your mother is very fond of Ivywild, having come here so long ago; and then too, your little brother, our first-born, lies here. You know I have large holdings of land in Wisconsin and Ohio, to one of which we might move, give our black people freedom and employ them—help them along until they could help themselves."

"A brilliant idea, father, and one I hope you will put into execution. Grandmother told me of the state of affairs at some of the plantations. I am sure you deplore it. But, father, if it be wrong to hold people in bondage, can there be any political peace as long as this wrong remains unrighted?"

"Then *you* would be willing to have me carry out this plan?" He looked the young man squarely in the eyes as if to interpret his thoughts.

"More than willing, father. I feel exactly as you do about it."

"But you understand it will sweep away more than half our fortune—and you are just starting a career?"

"Never mind that, daddy. I am only too happy that you and I are of the same opinion in this regard. My associations at West Point have strengthened a conviction secretly entertained before going there that slavery was wrong, constitutionally and otherwise, especially in a country based upon principles of freedom."

At this juncture a house-servant announced

Colonel Howard, and the major at once went to receive his neighbor.

Mr. Whitney intended selling his slaves and belongings in the valley at public vendue, and the colonel had called to ask from the major a loan of five thousand dollars that he might bid in such of the men as might be desirable for use in his abundant flax fields.

The request placed Major de Mai in a serious quandary. He had hoped to be able to leave the country before the new year, and would therefore need all the money he could command. Besides he did not want to longer aid traffic in human beings. Kind as he was, Major de Mai was a major in the full sense of the word and had his own theory of discipline which was law and gospel on the plantation. His slaves both loved and feared him. They were not treated cruelly nor overworked; neither were the families ever separated by being indiscriminately sold. They were obedient, industrious and happy, and their master's finances had never suffered as a result of his consideration for them. In seasons when it was necessary to rush the harvesting, driving was not required, the slaves themselves having a personal pride in the outcome; and it was a gala day for them when, with merry shouts and happy songs, they managed to house their crop in advance of planters whose niggers were perhaps under the sway of a blacksnake whip.

That he also might dispose of his slaves to an advantage did not once enter the major's mind when he asked time to consider the matter of the loan.

The handbill announced a public auction the twenty-fifth day of September in the year of our Lord 1860. Among other chattels Colonel Whitney would offer for sale his entire lot of slaves except

a few house servants. "One young buck, James," the description ran, "is twenty-four years of age, heavy-set, broad-shouldered, weight, one hundred seventy-two pounds. Bred at Maple Farm on the Big Sandy, guaranteed free from disease; able to perform as good a day's work as any animal in this district. Particular attention is also called to two wenches, mother and child, purchased at St. Augustine, Florida, just after their being landed in the states, and owned by the colonel for the past eight years. The elder, Lucy, as a house-servant excels in every particular; the filly, though barely twelve, bids fair to equal her mother. They are gentle, obedient, respectful, uncommunicative, neither having ever engaged in the common revels of the niggers. Other bucks, wenches and younger niggers to be sold to highest bidder over reserve price. Pedigrees of slaves will be given on day of sale. James Bradshaw, Auctioneer."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RUNAWAY

In deep reflection, Guy remained standing under the beech-tree. Since his return less than three days ago, events had followed each other so rapidly that his mind was almost in a whirl, but uppermost of all that troubled him to-day was the state of Nathalie's health, and his heart went out to her in tenderest sympathy, a sympathy that made her dearer to him than ever.

Then too, the political situation loomed up before him; he realized that the breach between the North and the South was widening, and feared the result would be far-reaching. In the event of war, he, being a military graduate, would no doubt be called upon to assume important responsibilities.

While thus meditating upon the different and apparently difficult conditions of affairs, the sound of heavily-falling hoofs startled him into instant alertness. A great blaze-face horse came down the road on a mad run. In the saddle was a woman who had evidently lost all control of it.

"Horrors! It is Claudia! If that horse swerves, it will go over the embankment—and she will be killed!"

Instantly he sprang to the roadway, making ready to grasp if possible the bridle which was flying with every bound of the fast-approaching animal. The road ran parallel with the river, dangerously near the bank, the side toward the water open, the other flanked by a rail fence. Faster and faster they came directly toward him, but Guy thought not of his own danger when hurrying into the road and facing the runaway, his only fear

being that his presence might cause it to shy and throw the rider. His one aim was to save the girl, now clinging to the pommel with both hands, her long hair floating wildly with the wind.

While he was preparing to leap for the swinging rein, one of the stable-men with quick wit had opened the barn doors and given Medoc and the other horses a smart lash that sent them bounding toward the gate. This attracted the frightened animal and it slackened speed. Grasping the halter, Guy brought it to a sudden stop which threw the rider into his arms.

When his eyes fell upon her deathly-white face, his heart almost ceased to beat. It was Luda Grey!

The love of a boy, quiescent for four years, sprang to the heart of the man, a living fountain.

Partially recovering, Luda gently drew herself from his supporting arms. Though pale and trembling, she seemed more beautiful than ever as she leaned against the fence, a picture of fear and surprise. Again her glorious eyes with their curious glints penetrated his soul, now hopelessly submerging him. His senses stirred, his heart over-full, Guy de Mai felt again the wordless message—that same message which had so strongly called him in the orchard. Again to Luda Grey's mind came Amarita's words, "He belongs to your life; you belong to his."

Neither spoke; there was no need for speech. Two souls communed as in the long ago. Messages of unconquerable passion were received by two rapidly-beating hearts now trammeled by silent tongues.

"How I thank you, sir—Mr. de Mai, of course," said Luda faintly, first to regain self-control, a forced smile parting her lips. "I—I did not know you had returned."

"Yes—on Saturday. But, tell me, Miss Grey, why did your horse run away? You came near being badly hurt, I fear." It was all he could think of to say, his astonishment as he was permitted to gaze into her innocent eyes, was too great for words.

"He is not accustomed to the saddle, and being nervous, ran at the least excuse, which chanced to be a rabbit bounding across the road. It was so unexpected that before I could brace myself, he jerked the reins out of my hands and started down the road like a veritable whirlwind. But fate was good to me, for had you not been near, I wouldn't have gotten off so safely."

"Wasn't it splendid that our horses could help to save you! Medoc, you're a hero," patting the noble creature who thrust his nose over the fence, claiming recognition.

With supreme self-command, Luda untied a securely-packed basket from the horn of the saddle. "This is for Miss Nathalie. Will you take it, please?"

"For Miss Nathalie—and from you!"

Did the name recall him to himself—to the fact of his engagement to Nathalie, and to the consciousness that the real love of his life, smoldering during his absence, had now broken forth in one mad flame? Of one thing he was positive: Love such as one must bear Luda Grey was ordained by heaven. No form of association could bring about such an infatuation. And in the light emanating from her eyes he thought he read the unspoken expression of her heart, and said to himself, "I believe she loves me too!"

Had his dream a double meaning? Was heroism in peace, or heroism in war, most to be applauded?

CHAPTER XXIV

A MOUNTAIN-TOP VIEW

A few weeks passed in the usual routine of plantation life, though all felt some grave crisis impending, for, since Lincoln's nomination he had, in his speeches, hit the nail of slavery on the head. And when from Baltimore came news of open preparations for a struggle, Major de Mai decided to move to Ohio.

Nathalie, who had been so much better for some time past as to allay the fears of all except the dear grandmother, awoke one day from an after-dinner nap to find her mother, instead of Susan, fanning her; then her father and Billy greeted her as if they had parted but yesterday, and she declared her measure of happiness full to overflowing.

So much was done by the younger set for Billy's entertainment that he became infatuated with Ivy-wild. All sorts of daylight excursions were arranged; and on moonlight nights they would often ride or row to various points of interest. Nathalie, however, was rarely strong enough to go with them except for very brief trips. So on this particular day when they went to the top of the mountain for a view, she insisted that Guy accompany the others, but she would remain at home and write some long-over-due letters to Baltimore.

The merry party cantered off, being joined near the ford by Ned Howard who, by natural selection, rode at Lila's side, though not quite certain in his own mind which of the twins he had the honor of escorting. While Billy Downing, anxious to pay court to Lily, had hardly an inkling as to whether

he was really chatting with the twin of that name or her sister, and in self-defence he appealed to Guy.

"I don't know which is which myself, but, as the darkies say, so say I: 'Dey's jus' bofe Miss Lila-Lily, an' dah dey is.' Ask them."

Guy's mood was however in marked contrast with that of his companions, and he soon fell to the rear. His soul cried out for Luda. Without her, life was scarcely worth the living. Yet he must shake off his depression—show himself worthy of his name. A de Mai could not be unfaithful, a coward nor a poltroon. His freedom was mortgaged and there was no alternative—Nathalie was to be his wife.

"I thought Miss Claudia was to be with us," he said to Ned.

"She is with Nan Smith," was the reply. "Nan has been poorly again—chilling, I believe. Sister Claudia regretted very much her inability to join us, but she and Nan are great friends, you know."

"Then if you folks don't mind, I think I'll ride ahead and ask after Miss Nan myself. If Claudia can leave, we'll follow. You will wait us at Mason's."

Nursing a faint hope that he might see the girl who now occupied his every thought, Guy rode over to the Smith home. In front of the house stood Claudia's pony. Through the open window Luda Grey could be seen at Nan's bedside, applying dampened cloths to the sick girl's fevered forehead; while in the wing Claudia and Jack Grey, apparently deeply moved, talked earnestly. To acquaint them of his presence, Guy delivered a quick command to Medoc. Claudia sank to a chair; Jack, pale but self-possessed, rose with manly dignity.

"You have discovered our secret; but, for the sake of Miss Ruth, you will not speak, I know. We were saying good-bye, for I am soon to start

for Richmond to find if possible some college where I can work my way. Nan has helped me greatly, but I need more systematic instruction. And when I have succeeded—as I am determined to succeed—I shall ask for Miss Claudia. If she is refused me, she has promised to be mine in spite of all opposition."

"I cannot find it in my heart to believe you wrong, Jack," said de Mai, "but, custom——"

"A custom more honored in the breach than in the observance," interposed Jack Grey.

"Shakespeare, by George!" ejaculated Guy. "That Nan Smith is a treasure." Then, inspired by the apt sally, added, "A custom that ofttimes elevates money above worth."

"Guy," said Claudia valiantly, brushing away a tear, "can you honestly compare with my Jack the sons of wealthy planters who, according to the dictates of custom, would be considered available—many of whom live upon the fame of their fathers' wealth, having no aim in life except to vie with each other in gambling, drinking and horse-racing bouts. The man I marry must have an aim in life, independence, and sufficient will-power to make his way. These characteristics I find in Jack Grey; and rich or poor, he is my choice. To me, he is one of nature's noblemen. I will bide my time."

"You are right, Claudia. I do not blame you," he said, remembering his own sleepless nights of late. "As for keeping your confidence, that is a matter of course."

Greatly to his disappointment, Guy did not catch another glimpse of Luda. She had flown. On seeing him, she had felt a serious twinge at her heart, and though her every impulse opposed her and her soul sickened at the thought, she knew it was best for her that she should never speak to him

again. Nothing but disappointment could come to her now, and the more often they should meet, just that much harder would be the final separation.

Nan was sleeping; so Guy left messages of sympathy. As Claudia and he rode up the mountainside, both talked with a freedom in which they had never before indulged, Claudia acknowledging: "I've cared for Jack ever since the Greys came here to live. He is honest, ambitious and upright. Of course he is hampered by lack of education, but this he is determined to overcome. His father has been ill and Jack could see no way to leave home; but now that Mr. Grey is so much better, he goes with a clear conscience, hoping to advance himself sufficiently to enter college. He has studied nights when he should have been asleep; yet his father does not approve, saying constantly that it is unwise for a poor man to learn much since it only renders him dissatisfied with his lot. But Mr. Grey does not seem to stop to think that a man's life is usually what he makes it."

Mrs. Mason had prepared a bountiful luncheon which all enjoyed. Her husband was generous; and though but a rough mountaineer, was a born leader, the men living in that vicinity following him implicitly. He was an uncompromising believer in the traffic of slaves and, like many others of his class who never owned nor could expect to own a negro, was rigidly opposed to abolition. The mountains where he lived were destined to give much trouble later on, for, being sparsely settled and heavily timbered, they afforded means of subsistence and concealment to many outlaws. Though the fact was not generally known, Mason was one of that rank and file—an illicit distiller, a successful moonshiner; yet fair Luna never cast her mild beams on his distilling apparatus, his fruits being

converted into apple-jack underground. His double house of hewn poplars stood high on the mountain, and under his bed a secret trap-door led to a subterranean passage; while innocent-looking boxes of garden seed and canned fruits were stored neatly behind the well-starched valances. Wagons loaded with barrels conspicuously marked "Sorghum Molasses," another product of the mountain farms, were often seen departing hence.

"When did you see Miss Luda?" asked Mrs. Mason.

"This morning," Claudia replied. "Nan Smith is chilling again, and Luda is taking care of her."

"Luda Grey is a angel an' nothin' short of it. She come up here when our little gal was took sick; an' if it hadn't been fur her, I'm nigh onto certain that child would a died."

"She is wearing herself out now; she looked pale and ill this morning."

"Now, if Miss Nan kin be moved, she'd better be fetched right 'long up here an' stay a spell. The mountain air'll be jes' the thing fur her. She kin have our big room, the best in the place. I've got a new feather bed an' I've got seven new pieced quilts that hain't never been used an' there's that good split-bottom cheer so she kin jes' set an' be waited on an' git well. Two cows has come in fresh an' there'll be plenty o' sweet milk and buttermilk an' butter, an' my hens is layin' so fast I dunno what to do with the aiggs an' Mason jes' won't pack 'em to the grocery."

"That's a splendid idea, Mrs. Mason. I'll send her word to-morrow morning. It will be her off-day from the fever. But won't it mean extra work for you?"

"Now, Miss Claudia, hush right up. She'll jes'

be good company, fur Mason's gone mighty nigh all the time, so he is."

"You're too good, Mrs. Mason. But you'll let me send you up some pretty patchwork pieces, won't you? I have a lot; and I can't bear to sew. You can sew and visit with Nan and have a good time."

Claudia had judged wisely when she spoke of the patchwork pieces. What jewels are to society women, and the fine arts to people of culture, so also is this piecing fearful and wonderful designs to the farmers' wives; the proudest of whom is she who possesses the largest and gaudiest collection of patchwork bed-quilts.

On the return trip Guy's eyes were fixed upon a little spot between Medoc's ears and yet it is more than likely he did not see that spot at all. He had mounted mechanically and rode in silence, giving himself wholly to reflections; while Claudia at his side was likewise rapt and uncommunicative. The trees overhead whispered one name to Guy, another to his companion; the birds sang them and each little cascade rippled them in impartial joyousness, as the riders pursued their journey homeward.

CHAPTER XXV

UNDER THE SYCAMORE

Some ten days succeeding the mountain ride Guy sat one pleasant afternoon alone on the piazza almost hidden from view by the hanging vines, and reveled in a picturesque scene which was not unusual at Ivywild.

In the distance under open sheds male slaves were hackling flax; near them the women, their heads bound with bright bandannas, were carding. Frequently they would run across the path with rolls, to a house in which were three looms—one for cotton, another for linen, and a third for woolen weaving. To-day only the second was in use. Grandma and Mrs. de Mai were directing the more expert weavers in starting a particularly fine piece designed for bed and table linen, in anticipation of the coming wedding—an event for which no date had as yet been set. On the ground beyond the sheds a group of pickaninnies busily separated the seed from cotton.

Guy's eyes rested for some time on the scene; but in spite of, or perhaps soothed by, the distant hum of bustle and activity, he became lost in meditation, as was his wont latterly.

The wing of the house in which Nathalie and her parents were installed, was overshadowed by a great sycamore, its massive trunk encircled by a seat affording a restful retreat under the sweeping branches. Above, in Nathalie's room, Mrs. Downing was taking an after-dinner nap; her daughter, with a favorite book, reclined in a comfortable

chair; while outside the door sat the ever-attentive Susan, industriously knitting.

Across the quiet lawn came a girl, who paused under the big tree. No one near, she sat down and resting on the bench the jar she had been carrying, took off her sunbonnet with which to fan herself. It was Luda; and she was bringing to Nathalie Downing some delicious wild honey, Jack having felled in the clearing a hollow tree wherefrom the dainty store had been removed. Her father mistakenly had said in her presence that he had passed the owner of Ivywild with his son on the way to their mountain cattle range; and desiring to see Nathalie Luda had taken advantage of the knowledge of Guy's absence from home.

She had an air of utter weariness. Her walk had been long; besides she was depressed by home conditions. Jack was soon to leave; her father was angry, her mother heartbroken; Granny Reardon, usually a comfort to her, far from well. Everything seemed combining to weigh, oh, so heavily, on her heart, that before she realized it, hot tears rolled down her cheeks.

A communion of spirit between herself and Guy de Mai must have aroused him from his abstraction. He rose, walked forth and stood on the edge of the porch a moment; then scanning his surroundings, went to the sycamore as if summoned; and there to his surprise, under its boughs sat the girl whom he loved with deepest passion. Forgetting all else in the world, he tenderly exclaimed, "What! Luda Grey—weeping!"

She did not speak. He caught the little sunburned hands in his and carried them to his lips, his own soul melting as he said, "Luda dear, what has caused these tears?"

Speechless, she rose to her feet, endeavoring to

retreat from him, but he held her hands. "What troubles your heart, beautiful Flower? May I call you this—you, who are to me the full-blown blossom from the loveliest bud that ever bared its beauty to the world—you, whom heaven has endowed with its richest blessings—purity, goodness?"

For a brief instant Luda allowed herself to indulge the delight of this moment which, bridging four years, brought back her first awakening, her first thought of love; and though her heart seemed to split in twain, she summoned all the power of her noble womanhood, praying only for *strength, strength!*

To his repeated question she replied with forced calmness, "Nothing is the matter with me," and sinking to the seat, whispered again—though her ashen face and dry lips bespoke the contrary—"Nothing—oh, nothing."

"You weep like this for nothing! That I cannot believe." Still holding her hand, he sat down beside her. "I must talk, Luda—I must, oh, God, I *must*."

"Jack is going away, you know; and I—we all—feel——"

"So badly," he finished. "Luda dear," more closely imprisoning her hands, "this is my opportunity. Heaven has ordered it so. I cannot see you in sorrow and remain silent, unmoved, for I love you as my life—you *are* my life. Do not, I pray you, turn away, heedless of my words, for, little girl, you are heart of my heart, soul of my soul. I loved you the first time my eyes met yours. With your rare intelligence, your innocent charm, you fascinated me, and though we were little more than children then, my soul went out to you and met a response as sacred as heaven itself; I know it did. And if I am a man to-day, to you I owe my

first inspiration. And how, oh how, could I have forgotten!"

"Mr. de Mai, you must not say these things to me. You know you must not. How dare you! Oh, how can you—how can you forget I have a heart!"

"Ah, 'tis the voice of my unhappy mind, Luda, for you are light of my life by day, angel of my dreams, and I realize to the fullest extent that I am lost forever without your love. As a flower before unseen you entered my life, unfolding your glorious personality. And as the sun of morning warms the cold earth, love for you permeates my being. Knowing conditions as I do, I have no rest day nor night."

"Oh, why should a new sorrow come to me—to me, whose vision of life seems so contrary to her own soul's happiness! Have you forgotten yourself?"

"Forgotten myself—yes, I have—everything except you and that I love you. God knows I do not want to increase your suffering—rather to contribute to your happiness. Since that day your horse ran away—oh, that never-to-be-forgotten day when I caught you in my arms, and your very soul looked through your innocent eyes into my face—you have been to my life the link between love eternal and unending disappointment. And I cannot see you weep and not confess to you how my heart longs for you—longs to comfort you. I so want the right to be always your comforter, Luda—to stand by your side in your joys, in your sorrows, and in all dangers—no matter at what cost, to save, to protect you. I want—I beg—that right, a right only you can give."

"How can you speak in this manner to me—speak of love, when you know you belong to another—are

engaged to another—one of your own class. Were this not true, yet——. No matter what might be my feelings—you are, according to conditions of life, far above me—far, far."

"Luda Grey, I deny what you have just said. You are worthy the place of any queen—you *are* a queen; and in all the world you are the only one for me, the crowning effort of God's masterpiece, holiest of women, my queen. God has made only one woman for me, and that is you, Luda. Though that may seem impossible to you, it is true, true; heaven knows my heart, 'tis true."

"Stop, I entreat you! And since you seem to have utterly forgotten yourself, remember your vows to Miss Downing. You are engaged to her—should and *do* love her. I know—*you*—*love*—her. Any other attitude on your part is madness, madness—and I will not listen. I will not be a party to your downfall, to the insults you heap upon your own head."

And she turned once more to go, yet with a look of hope and fear on her face.

"Luda, do not turn away from me, I implore."

"Then acknowledge your love for Miss Downing—or I shall hate—both myself and——"

"Oh, don't, don't, Luda! Don't tell me you could ever hate me. It would be more than I could stand." His head dropped low; then in words full of emotion, "Yes, I do love Nathalie. She is the personification of grace and goodness. I can place her on a pedestal and worship at her shrine. But my heart, Luda Grey, can be called its own rival, for oh, I adore you! I went to West Point filled with the greatest admiration for you. On my journey east I could hear your gentle voice, see your charming face, feel your incomparable personality—you who had come into this valley so short a time before, enriching it with your glowing

beauty—you who, since my departure have opened the doors of cold aristocracy with your fervent goodness, your priceless worth, and now possess the esteem of all who know you. At the academy there was time only for hard study. Under such training my heart was closed to all; even my love must have slumbered; I cannot explain it else, for I was a determined student. But I am heart-broken at the state of affairs now. If I were not engaged, Luda, tell me, would you then listen to my prayer? Could you love me then?" Rising, he held out both his hands to her. "Could I then hope you would ever give that dear little hand to me, put your heart in my keeping? Could I, Luda dear?"

"Oh no, no, that would be detrimental to you in your career—most humiliating to me to think I might ever be a stumbling-block to you. What I have said before, I now repeat. I am born to poverty, to the lower walks of life. Even if you were freed and if there were no Miss Nathalie—you would still be the son of your fathers, a de Mai, born to affluence; I would still be poor Luda Grey."

"You are unjust to yourself, Luda. Listen to me; no circumstances of birth, no bonds——"

"Oh, do not, I pray you—I will not listen!" placing her hands over her ears. "No, I will not hear you. Remember your allegiance to——"

"Then, Luda, turn me away—if you will it so. But I *can* say that I believe you once had an affection for me; I truly do. And I believe you honor the memory of that love now. Though I love you as a man loves but once I can but admire your loyalty to Miss Downing. I am not ashamed of my weakness in my fathomless love for you, if it be weakness. Something binds me irresistibly to you. I cannot dissolve that tie—I cannot

find strength to give you up. It is not in my power. If I ever loved Nathalie, you I worship, idolize. And to-day, at this moment, I cast at your feet all I am or ever shall be. I do not wish to be unfaithful to Nathalie, but—O God, what may I say—will you not give me one word of hope—hope that some day—if——"

Luda drew herself to her full height—far more beautiful than ever in his estimation—and looked at him for a brief space with a strange, indefinable light in her pure eyes; then, with indescribable pathos in her low voice, spoke sweetly, sadly: "You do not know what you have done to me this day—that your words have burned into my poor soul; the very essence of my life has been stirred. But for the sake of your own future let all, I beg you, let it be forever dead. Your belief that you love me is unjust to Nathalie—to me. It is unfounded—and an insult to your own intelligence. I must hear no more." With eyes cast to the earth, she turned to go. "Good-bye, good-bye."

"Luda, Luda, I implore you, do not this to me. You ask more than mortal man has power to grant."

"Then I appeal to the immortal in you. Be true to your highest promptings. Let me never detest myself for having once thought I could love you—love the man now engaged to another."

Sinking to the seat from which she had risen as she had turned from him a moment before, trembling visibly, she pleaded again, "Oh, let me once more revel in the belief that love for Luda Grey would not degrade—let me retain the value placed on my unhappy life—loveless *Poverty*."

His face blanched. Her words had cut like a two-edged sword; and in a voice stifled by the brave effort to meet her high ideal, he said, "You have conquered. Love for you—exalts," and turn-

ing his face from her, he walked slowly away.

For a time Luda sat motionless; then, burying her face in her hands, murmured, "Heaven pity me!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A BOW OF PINK RIBBON

Physically exhausted, spirit spent, Luda called to a passing house-servant, to whom she delivered the jar, saying, "It is for Miss Downing."

Awed by her sad face and flaming cheeks, the slave's eyes followed as she started homeward.

"I must never see him again, never! I must banish him from my thoughts," she murmured as she hastily crossed the lawn. "Oh, how could he tear my heart strings so! Why did he not let me continue in the belief that he did not care! Oh, how my heart aches—the pain reaches my very brain!"

She swerved as she walked, almost falling in her effort to be more brave than ever before, or her strength justified.

Presently she saw Jack riding down the road, leading a second horse, as he had promised. Alighting, he helped her to the saddle, and they rode home where Luda's last thought that night was: "If I might only sleep, and on waking find it all a dream—or, oh, if I might go away from this valley, far from all, everything!"

"Go, go," said a voice. It was Amarita.

"Go! Where *could I* go?" And she stared into the darkness of her room.

"Light will come. Rest now. God's light is brightest behind the clouds."

The words fell like balm on her wounded spirit, steeping her soul in sweetest slumber.

The next morning Guy walked out and sat down under the sycamore alone. As his thoughts went back to the previous day, his eye was attracted to a

single rose. He grasped it mechanically, when, to his surprise, instead of a rose, he held a dainty pink ribbon caught by a briar. Recalling having seen a similar one nestling near Luda's ear, he fondly pressed the token of her he loved to his lips and placed it in his vest pocket.

As he planned for the entertainment of his guests during the week that followed, none suspected the demon of unrelenting despair tugging at his heart, almost tearing it in twain. But he was a soldier, and as a soldier must bear his burden—now a double burden of his own making.

CHAPTER XXVII

A CONQUEST

Lincoln had been delivering anti-slavery speeches, opposing secession, and war excitement was increasing. Political arguments pro and con, setting all sections aflame, were in a measure distracting Guy's thoughts from his own perplexities. His old preceptor, Dr. Hampton, took every occasion both in and out of church to allay the growing animosity in the community divided in political belief and against itself, and counselled moderation, forbearance, and conceding to one's neighbor's the right to hold opposite views to one's own.

Men and boys were mustered for military practice, and on every hand was heard the call of the bugle and the beat of the drum. Speeches were heard wherever persons could be assembled. But through it all stalked the spirit of patriotism.

"Down with the abolutionist, Lincoln!" cried the slave-holder and his sympathizers. "Our money is invested in niggers; we must continue slavery. State sovereignty at any cost!"

While equally ardent, the anti-slavery speakers at barbecues and gatherings shouted "Give us liberty and Lincoln! A union of states!"

Shooting and cutting occurred daily, even among relatives; one was not safe outside his own door.

Major de Mai, wishing to avoid the broils and hot arguments rife with each movement of the campaign, exercised the discretion of silence. He had not as yet fully made up his mind as to the best method of freeing his slaves. His wife was not easily persuaded into accepting his views, and he

was loth to take any step until they had become of one mind on this as on other subjects. Imbued with the idea of slave-holding, she could see no other way. In her opinion, to part with her slaves would be to break a sacred trust, for had not many of them been left to her by her father's will! Surely *he* would never have owned them if it had been wrong. Finally, however, as the political upheaval continued, and she had at last acquiesced in her husband's judgment, he could hardly see his way clear to taking action before the election. Then too, he did not wish to excite Nathalie—although he was unaware that in her heart there raged a conflict of conflicts—a battle between love and duty—to which the freeing of the slaves could add little.

Nathalie was not deceived as to her condition. She knew well that she too was fading as with the Summer, and that what she purposed doing, must be done quickly. So, after careful consideration, after viewing and reviewing, after sleepless hours of planning, she sent a cordial note begging Luda Grey to come to see her the following afternoon, telling her that she had something important to say to her; and besides, the absence of the young folks on an arranged boating party would afford them an excellent opportunity for a quiet little visit alone.

Pleading the luxury of laziness, Nathalie kept her room the next day, waving her handkerchief and kissing her hand from the vine-shaded window as the party rowed away down the river.

Just as Guy was being voted captain, Ned Howard and Claudia had ridden up. "Miss Claudia will be my mate," Guy said, gently assisting her to a seat in the first boat; while the others paired off in heart-selected groups of two.

As the boys plied the oars the frollicksome girls

rocked the boat, shouting with delight at the big crawfish, mud-turtles, etc., in the blue water below.

When they were out of sight, and the sound of oars and merry laughter had died away on the distant waters, Nathalie drew her easy chair near the window where, with intense eagerness and calm determination she waited.

Half an hour later a gentle tap was heard on the door. It was Luda—though scarcely the Luda of old. Renunciation had sapped her strength almost beyond the power of recuperation; and her soul was sickened. The few days that had passed since her interview with Guy could not cure the terrible heart-wounds.

Nathalie looked divinely beautiful in a baby-blue negligee with delicate lace draped about her arms and shoulders, while her ash-blond hair fell loosely about her white throat. Beside her, on a tabouret, peacefully reposed an open book, a crushed rose marking the last reading.

Luda's face had lost its bloom, and her great eyes took on a look of humble submission as she said, "How sweet you look, Miss Nathalie—a real fairy!"

"That, dear, is exactly what I'm longing to be—or a sort of fairy godmother; and," with a winsome smile, "I'm depending on you to help promote the wish. You have been so lovely to me heretofore, and now I want you to promise that you will humor a particularly desirable fancy of mine, a little wish that I hold most dear—one that you alone can help me in."

"Certainly, Miss Nathalie," and Luda knelt, resting one knee on the invalid's foot-stool, "if I can. Indeed, I would do anything that is within my power to please you. But I fear I am very weak in any good cause."

"No, no, Luda; that is unfair to yourself. But

answer me truthfully one question; I say truthfully, because you might feel justified in evasion. I am your friend; trust me. You will not regret the confidence. Why are you so sad lately? May I not know your little sorrows, that I may perhaps help you? Is it that you are in love—or has someone hurt your heart?"

The drooping head was suddenly lifted, and Luda's tearless but scintillating eyes pierced Nathalie's in such surprise and questioning wonder that she seemed not less than the artist's ideal of the Madonna. The regal young womanhood of this marvellous girl whose mixed blood and majestic mien rendered her the perfect embodiment of that loveliest, most magnificent, of subjects for the limner's art, made a deep impression upon her would-be benefactress—so deep, in fact, that in her heart of hearts, Nathalie felt sure her intentions were upborne by some indefinable power, some power many times stronger than herself—and that if she had resolved upon an action, no less than heaven itself was her support.

"Luda dear, will you pardon my seemingly unwarrantable questions to-day?" Exhibiting heartfelt pity toward the girl who must have suffered more acutely since her brave renunciation of the man who had confessed his undying love, than even she had imagined, Nathalie spoke with tenderest womanly feeling. But she went on: "You will tell me all, won't you, dear?"

Though astonished beyond words, Luda strove to regain composure, determining with each breath to face the question with the whole truth. "Y-e-s," and she faltered, "I thought it was love, Miss Nathalie."

"And does not that love still exist?"

"Oh no, no. It was infinitely wrong, so I knew

I must banish even the thought of it. You know a girl of my class could hardly aspire to the affection of one belonging to a superior family, even when one realizes, as I do perfectly, that happiness could never come by association with those called my own equal. So the only thing left me was to forget."

"Then you tried with all your strength to forget him—and could you not, Luda?"

"I believed I had conquered."

"Have you seen him lately—has he ever declared his love?"

"I have seen him, yes—but each time quite by accident. I am sure that it was not that he sought to tell me, or even to meet me." Luda turned away as if seeking some witness, or some way to emphasize the truth of her admission.

"If you knew that he loved and would marry you—you would not then refuse him, would you?"

"Yes, oh yes, I would," she answered, as a whirlwind of memories crowded her brain. Sensations indefinable pulled at her heart; her bosom heaved. "Marriage is a serious problem, Miss Nathalie. I would approach even the thought of it with infinite reverence. But I have not allowed myself to cherish the smallest hope; I know well that it would be unpardonably wrong. So—oh please—you can never know what this means to me. In your position you cannot understand the heart-sufferings of one like me—one whose heart does not seem to fit anywhere, any place."

A tear that till now had resisted falling, rolled down the colorless cheek, and burying her face in the folds of Nathalie's silken robe, the heart-sore girl sobbed plaintively.

With her own sympathetic eyes moist, Nathalie continued. "I have probed your heart prehaps unmerci-

fully; but be assured it is that you may be spared deeper pain. You are worthy all the good the world can bestow, and my desire is that you may some day possess the man who loves you—one whom I believe you love; and to that end I have prayed earnestly, seriously, in the past few days, convinced as I have been that neither your life nor his could ever be complete in the absence of that possession."

With the golden light of a fast-waning sun streaming in at the window, a sense of some divine security came over Luda. Disappointment, lonliness and regret that for so long had been uppermost in her heart, seemed to drop away. Looking calmly into Nathalie's face, she asked with a new seriousness, "Why should you take such interest in me, Miss Nathalie. I am only a poor girl, and have but one desire—a heart-craving to do some good for those whom I might help. You are a beautiful, rich young lady who does not need even kindnesses from persons in my walk of life."

"I have entertained for you a singular sense of love ever since our first meeting; and to-day, dear, I seem to know you better and to appreciate you more. 'Tis true you may aspire to nothing greater than doing good. But you are goodness its very self—a jewel in the crown of life, that needs external polishing only. And since you ask me why I have sought to learn more of your likes and opportunities, it is only my desire to see you occupy a different sphere—one that will better fit you—one wherein your happiness may be increased. Then too, I am perhaps somewhat selfish in a wish that you should in a measure owe your future happiness to me—that to the end of your lives both you and the man who loves you may hold sacred the memory of Nathalie. The day you sat beneath the sycamore under my window—you remember, dear——"

The crushed roses on Nathalie's bosom fell heavily to the floor. Luda started, but did not raise her head.

Pressing her hands caressingly, Nathalie hesitated, sighed, looked about her as if in doubt of herself, "I heard all, Luda—every word that passed between you two. It struck deeply in my heart then; but to-day I cannot say that I blame him. Feelings emanating from one's soul, as on that occasion, are sometimes beyond control. But your womanly loyalty to me was magnificent, heavenlike. You aroused the man to his better self, to an appreciation of his responsibilities. And this you will always do, I know. It is in you—it *is you.* He would be far more useful to the world with such a woman as you for his wife. But although by every instinct of worth and refinement, you are eligible for that position, I know, as you yourself, that your lack of rudimental education, of accomplishments, of experience in the social world, is a serious drawback. The answer to my earnest prayer came like an inspiration: 'Nathalie, you are able to remove these barriers; do so.' God has been good to me in that I have money of my own; and I beg to pay your tuition at a school where you may be fitted for any position life affords. And then too, Luda dear, I want to substitute you in a matter that is very near my heart. Subject of course to your acceptance. I have written a letter to a dear friend of mine, a Miss Carter, the principal of a young ladies' seminary near Atlanta, Georgia, where you might remain under her protecting care until you shall have finished—until, dear Luda, under the refined influence of such a school, no social set would exclude but instead, would seek you. With your glowing personality and such acquirements you would be a magnet anywhere you

pleased to go. Among your associates at Carter Seminary would be daughters of some of the most aristocratic and proud families of the South, whose companionship would be of the greatest advantage to you. And Luda dear, somewhere in the past *your* family has been of exalted degree; by every movement, by every inherent attribute, you impress this upon me. Alone, a woman cannot always battle successfully for herself, I know, especially if she possess a nature of innate refinement as retiring as yours. Hence I desire to place in your hands the means for a more liberal education, exacting one condition, of course—that the money shall be used for this purpose only. What I desire to know to-day is, will you go? Will you do this for yourself—for me—and for—oh, I am quite exhausted—but I so want your answer. An answer in the affirmative will ease my heart; and the knowledge that I too have done something for those I love will make me stronger than could anything else in the world to-day."

"Is it your request that I go at once?" asked Luda with suppressed emotion, and dry but fevered eyes as they gazed into Nathalie's—soft blue and tear-bedimmed.

"Yes, yes—without a day's delay if possible."

"But my parents would never consent, Miss Nathalie. Father does not approve of higher education for girls."

"That being the case, Luda, it would be better not to inform anyone. I am urging you for your own sake, firm in the belief some good angel has inspired me in your behalf."

"But I never traveled alone in my whole life—I wouldn't know what to do."

"Yes, dear, perhaps this is true; but in some way, God's way, you live the part to-day of a much-

traveled person. You are an enigma, yet a source of joy and wonder to all who meet you. Following my direction, you will not find the slightest difficulty. You would not hesitate, would you, dear, knowing that it is all for your highest good?"

"Oh Miss Nathalie, this is what Amarita meant; she told me I would go."

"But I do not understand you."

"Amarita, dear Miss Nathalie, is a beautiful shadow lady who speaks to me when I sleep. I thought only she understood my—." Disconcerted, Luda checked herself. "As you have intimated today, Amarita tells me that in other lives mine has been quite superior."

"Then it is as I have believed—you are groveling in an environment greatly inferior to the commands of your beautiful nature. And a few terms at this most excellent seminary would be just what you need. They might also enable you to better understand the wonderful shadow lady who is, perhaps, the leading spirit moving me in your interest."

"I have longed for an education such as you speak of, all my life. But I fear I haven't the courage to leave home. Yet—if you say it is best—then let it be so—I will, even though I shall disobey the wishes of my own."

"Do not wait another day," pleaded Nathalie. "Let me feel that nothing will stand in the way of my being my little Luda's fairy godmother. In this I do my best for you and for—." But she said no more.

The strain was fast telling upon the sick girl's strength; and realizing that it would be unwise to further agitate her by urging excuses, kissing the frills of her benefactor's garment, Luda said, "I leave to-morrow."

"Your decision has made me exceedingly happy.

Now, please give me that little packet and those letters from the dressing-table—and get a piece of paper from the desk to put around them. This one is for Miss Carter; until you have delivered it into her own hands it must be considered sacred. Feeling sure that you would accept, I have prepared the way. And now we must hasten, as the boating party will soon return. I pray that Guy nor anyone may know of our little plot until the proper time. God will guide you, blessed girl, in all your future."

Both girls trembled with excitement; while Nathalie, unrolling several bank-notes from the package, hurriedly thrust them into one of the letters.

"Here is your way-map for the journey, also the money for immediate expenses. The balance goes in Miss Carter's letter, which I advise you to keep securely about your person." And affectionately embracing her ward, Nathalie said, "Now go—God be your protector. But one more promise," as still she clung to Luda's hand, "before I have released you, dear; if I should not live to see you again, and if—someday—the man now engaged to me—whether perchance I shall have been his wife or not—should wish to marry you—and you love him then—say you will accept him."

"And I should then be free to love him," said Luda sadly, turning her face from the girl who would make such a thing possible. "For you, I promise."

As the door closed behind Luda Grey, Nathalie sank to her chair.

"O God, what have I done! But I would die that I might prepare the way for him—for his happiness."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE MERCY OF FLOOD

Scarcely realizing the import of her promise, Luda ran downstairs, across the lawn, and on far up the roadway until, exhausted, she paused for breath.

"Oh, oh, I have promised! Can I do it! Must I leave all I love in this world and go to a place I don't know! I told Guy de Mai I did not love him, but oh, it must be love—this constant gnawing at my heart—holy, divine love. How could I so promise Miss Nathalie!"

Sinking down upon a wayside boulder, she burst into tears, weeping aloud like a child. "I have really worshipped him every moment since that day in the orchard when first I saw his grand face. I have denied it, yes, even to my own heart. *My* poverty—*his* wealth—oh, how they have made me suffer!"

From the river there was borne to her ears the sound of merry laughter. Yielding to an impulse, she rose and looked back toward Ivywild. Her heart throbbed wildly as she recognized the one voice, the one form, for, standing on the boulder, she was able to distinguish the occupants of the different boats pulling upstream. A moment she stood as one in a dream; then breathing a last farewell, started on her way, sustained only in the belief that the step she was about to take would perhaps be best for all—that her absence from the Sandy Valley might heal the breach that seemed inevitable between Nathalie and Guy.

"How selfish of me to use this money on myself! Father would be glad for a little with which to

buy fruit. And Jack—how it would help him. But no, I must not tempt myself, since I have solemnly promised it shall be used for one purpose only. Otherwise, I must return it at once. Oh, dear, dear, but then, this will enable me to have what I have wished for, prayed for—education—the one condition that may elevate me in spite of our poverty. And, having the opportunity, I should be like one caught up to heaven for very joy. But to run away in a cold-hearted fashion—leave all, just for the sake of improving one's own condition would surely brand one as utterly heartless, and I am not, no, I am not."

She sat down again, this time under a tree—and endeavored to weigh accurately the reasons for and against—her conscience a veritable battle-ground of opposing forces.

"Miss Downing sees the impassable gulf between Guy and me. Strangely, she is not jealous. If I could see her again and tell her I do not wish to go away—return to her the money, I believe I should be more happy. I would surely never again lament poverty or lack of education. This parting costs too many heartaches. It is a lesson I shall not soon forget; and I mean to be less rebellious in all the future. After all, money is a burden. If I feel the weight of Nathalie's gift so acutely, what must a greater fortune be to one?

"Should I go, Guy would forget me as he forgot me before. For myself, oh, dear, what can be in store for me? Amarita has said it is not God's plan that we should divine what is before us, else mankind would cease from effort; that desire and hope must inspire us; and, like others, I must meet disappointments, but that friends of many ages are watching over me—leading me."

So she sat reviewing recent occurrences, turning

over in her mind the advantages if she chose to accept, and weighing consequences if she should not. One moment her heart was filled with gratitude; then, as the reverse side presented itself, her soul sickened. Such a school would no doubt fit her for a higher rank in life, afford better opportunities; but would that compensate—would she be happier? Was it worth the sacrifice? Would she marry Guy if there were no Nathalie and opportunity afforded? No, no; it would be too hazardous. She would not dare.

The girl did not realize the passing time. She was in a maze of conflicting thoughts, until recalled to herself by sudden drops of rain. Springing to her feet she found, to her dismay that she was in the midst of a storm.

A ponderous curtain of black extended over river and valley involving all in darkness. Great threatening clouds swooped around her; the wind blew a gale that well-nigh swept her from her feet. She was pelted by big drops of rain mingled with hail, and blinded by long chains of vivid lightning followed by crash after crash of thunder.

Aided, however, by the darting flashes which now rent the clouds in terrific splendor, she sought a place of supposed safety under an overhanging cliff by the river. The rain came down in silvered sheets alternating with moving torrents of blackness. Ugly bats fluttered around her; but neither the loathsome creatures, the muttering thunder, nor the heavy darkness held more terrors for Luda Grey than did her thoughts, for the tumult of her mind was in keeping with the tempest.

Startled by a roaring noise immediately followed by a brighter flash, she perceived a mighty volume of water rushing toward her, engulfing everything in its course, menacing even the shelving rock under

which she was sheltered. Cresting and rearing mountain high, the advancing wave seemed like the horrid jaws of some grim monster opening to consume her.

"A cloud-burst in the mountains!" she exclaimed. "I shall be lost—carried with the flood into that wild current below! Mine must be a guilty, rebellious soul to deserve such fate!"

She grasped a dogwood limb projecting beyond the rock. The swirling waters caught her feet and flung her against the slender bush to which she held with all her strength as the rushing tide swept around, threatening to dislodge the very rock.

The great tree under which she had sat pondering too long, proved unequal to the gale, and fell with a heavy crash across the river. Hence, bound in by rocks and trees on one side, precipitous mountain on the other, water all around, Luda—with the instinct of self-preservation—clutched more tightly the frail bush that stood between her and a watery grave, peering the while into the darkness with a forlorn hope that momentary flashes of lightning might reveal some manner of escape. Though the waters rose frightfully, they did not yet cover the fallen poplar whose topmost boughs rested on the opposite shore.

Had Providence snatched her from the maw of the mighty flood? And did that same Providence now offer a possible means of escape—the uprooted tree?

Dared she risk it? It meant only death to remain where she was. The waters had at once poured into the place where the poplar had stood, and now eddied wildly about the rock. The tree, a bridge between the two embankments, was the sole course left her. So she climbed slowly over its upturned roots to the trunk; loosened and discarded her sod-

den sandals; and, as the electric tongues gave intermittent light from above, carefully made her way along until she reached the branches.

As the constantly-rising waters were sweeping the boughs from shore, one lurid flash brought to view a cut grapevine suspended from an elm, sometimes used by children for handswings.

"Oh, if I might get near enough to seize it!" she thought.

But all was dark again. The boughs were bending beneath her; the water covered her feet; and the merciless wind whirled the vine far beyond reach.

Agonized, almost breathless, she stood, with no chance even to retrace her steps.

The debris washed from the lowlands above encircled her in fiendish swirls. She clutched desperately at anything that came near, while the constantly-breaking boughs were being swept away, leaving her more and more at the mercy of the flood. With skirts almost torn from her body, she was in rags.

A more-dazzling flame pierced the blackness momentarily illuminating all around; but the vine, the sport of the gale, had swung far on the other side of the water.

Despair seizing her heart, she lifted her eyes heavenward and raised her voice to Him to whom we turn in our extremity. "O God, hast Thou too forsaken me?"

A dense wall of darkness was enclosing her; floating logs bruised the hands that still clung to the submerged branches, and the water had reached her waist. There, alone, motionless save as swayed by the current, Luda Grey awaited the fate that was inevitable—the end.

One thought only of earth or earthly things passed through her mind—Guy's last words: "Luda,

I want the right to stand by your side, in joy, sorrow, danger—I love you."

It was a precious memory, a memory crowding out all other memories. Clasping one hand to her bosom as if to keep the words buried in her heart while the impenetrable darkness and rising waters closed in about her, her soul prayed, "Into Thy hands, Father, I commend my spirit."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SEARCH

The most violent storm ever experienced in the Sandy Valley passed away. The sun rose the following morning diffusing its warmth over rain-soaked earth, and the members of the Grey family resumed their usual duties; not doubting the least that Luda had remained over night at Ivywild. But when the day wore away, nightfall approached, and she did not return, Jack, concluding the river must now be fordable, mounted his newly-broken colt and taking Luda's saddle horse, Nellie, started to find her. The current still swift, the horses were forced to swim; Nellie preceding, the water above the stirrups. He caught her on the incline leading to the Smith home, where his inquiry elicited the information that the Smiths had not seen his sister either on that or the previous day. Considering the condition of the river, Jack was not alarmed. She had, of course, remained at Ivywild; so he made his way thitherward.

The starlight revealed the fallen poplar, convincing evidence of the force of the gale. He found the major and Guy on the porch reviewing the traces of the disastrous storm. They told him that Luda had not visited Ivywild for some days.

"'Skuse me, Marse Guy, 'skuse me," said Rush, who, after hitching the horses had followed Jack to the house, "Miss Luda visit Miss Nathalie yistiddy while you all wuz in de boats. But she dun started home befo' de rain comed up."

Now frightened, Jack hurried back. Mounting Medoc, Guy overtook him. Near the Howard plan-

tation they met Joe Johnson who told them a slipper had been picked up from among the roots of the old poplar that had been blown down.

"A sandal—th' sort o' thing they wore in Bible times, you know. An' nobody has anything like 'em 'cept Miss Luda."

His story startled them, and they struck off at high speed for the point, where Guy stopped only sufficiently long to comprehend the danger of an attempted crossing there, and rode back to Ivywild for negroes, lanterns and torches; while Jack galloped home trusting his sister had arrived after his departure. But he soon returned to take up the search.

The heavy rain had obliterated all foot-prints. Darkies rowed up and down on either side of the swollen stream, but found no trace of the lost girl.

The whole community was aroused. Deep places in the river were dragged, and great piles of debris thrown up by the turbulent waters for miles along the shore, examined. Day after day passed with no solution, and hope was abandoned. Frantic, the Greys could arrive at but one conclusion—Luda had been washed away.

With a haunting consciousness of having unpremeditatedly wronged the one girl of all the world whom he unselfishly desired for his own, Guy went frequently to the place where the sandal had been found, often wondering if the untimely declaration of his love might have driven its wearer to self-destruction as a means of untwisting the coil in which three lives seemed hopelessly enmeshed.

CHAPTER XXX

A SLAVE SALE

The Whitney slave sale occurred as advertised, but Guy and his father took no interest in it. The major's own holdings were in the market, and he had received a noteworthy proposition from a syndicate of northerners, whose representative explained that the idea of his company was to deal, not in slaves, but in land and timber. "This," though the major, "is an opportunity. Without effort on my part, my great desire is working itself out, and I shall be free to act."

Guy had not intended to be present at the Whitney auction, but his unrest over Luda's sad fate sent him off each day in a forlorn hope of securing diversion from the horrible strain; and on Thursday, finding himself at the place of vendue, he entered the yard with Bob Whitney just as the afternoon session was about to begin.

"Gentlemen," said the auctioneer, "I regret to announce that James, generally known as Big Black Jim, one of our most valuable bucks, escaped last night and has not been, to our knowledge, yet overtaken. We have, however, for your first consideration this afternoon a young negress—what we call a 'filly.' This property, as you will notice by the descriptive circular, has at no time been transferred. Although not robust, she is of remarkably strong lineage—her mother, West Indian; her father, purely African. The 'filly' at four years was purchased by the colonel's agent at public sale in St. Augustine. The mother is one of the most capable house-servants in the Kentucky-Virginia

Valley, and the younger one promises to be her equal. Colonel Whitney could not be induced to part with either except that not wishing to retain all his holdings he feels he should discriminate in favor of the older house-servants who have reared his children and are greatly beloved by his family. I mention these facts, gentlemen, that you may understand the unusual value of the property before you."

Trembling visibly, the girl of twelve stood upon the block while the buyers gathered around to make their examinations. She was clad in yellow cheese-cloth which, carelessly thrown over her arm, was drawn across the bosom and fastened at the other side, exposing one leg to the thigh. Her skin was sallow, bordering on a darker hue; eyes, black; hair, apparently straight, braided in tiny pig-tails over which she wore a cap-shape bandanna.

One bolder buyer, after examining the muscles, joints, eyes, teeth, et cetera, followed the leg from knee to toe, raised the foot and in a jesting manner, ran the back of a small pen-knife over the sole. The slave winced nervously, giving vent to a smothered cry, whereupon Keeny, the overseer, standing near, gave her a severe lash on the ankles, which cruel and unexpected action brought forth tears.

All eyes were turned toward the auctioneer and the girl who was trying to restrain herself, when an agonized voice sounded from the pen. Suddenly, like a wild animal, a woman leaping the boards, rushed to the block; threw up both hands implor-ingly; crossed herself, and in the tragedy of despair cried:

"Mother of Jesus, save me my child!" Then she made the sacred sign upon the feet of the girl, and rising, turned toward the spectators.

"Men—masters," she said in broken English,

"may God eternal help you to see the truth! Do not separate me from my child. She is all I have—all—I am not of African blood, nor was her father—he is a Spanish——"

Keeny attempted to lash her as he had lashed the girl, but was instantly surrounded by the mountaineers who, although too poor to be purchasers, had gathered to witness the sale.

"Go on," said one young woodsman.

"Tell yer story," urged another.

Mason, who was half-tide over with apple-jack, drawing a pistol from each boot, said to Keeny, "Don't yer move till we-uns says so. An' don't yer let that black-snake wriggle again!" indicating the buck-skin whip.

"Go on," repeated the first speaker to the now frenzied woman. "Tell us all about it. You're no nigger, an' we-uns believes you."

The mountaineers lined up, and matters looked serious. Meanwhile the auctioneer and buyers sought shelter under nearby sheds as big drops of rain began to fall and a wind sprung up, tossing the trees furiously.

The woman, indifferent to the storm, her face indexing intense mental anguish continued, "We, my child and I, were seized on the Cuban coast where my husband, her father, had taken us to bathe—we were thrust into a boat crowded with stolen blacks—a strap was fastened over my mouth, my hands were tied, and so, chained to a bar we were brought to this country. My child of only four was kept from me, and I was told with curses that if I made an outcry, she would be cast overboard to feed the sharks."

Agonized, she paused. Her hair had fallen like a mantle over her shoulders almost to the bottom of her homespun skirts. Lifting it from her ears with

both hands, she stood in an attitude of listening, motionless as stone, her eyes glowed with wondering expectancy, as of one who feels the approach of some saving power.

Mingled with the low rumbling of the coming storm was heard the sound of beating hoofs. Two men on running horses came up the long lane toward the barn-yard. The leader, a swarthy young man of commanding appearance, coatless, hatless, loosened his feet from the stirrups, dropped the reins and jumped to the earth.

"Ramon!" and the woman fell into his arms.

"Lucile!"

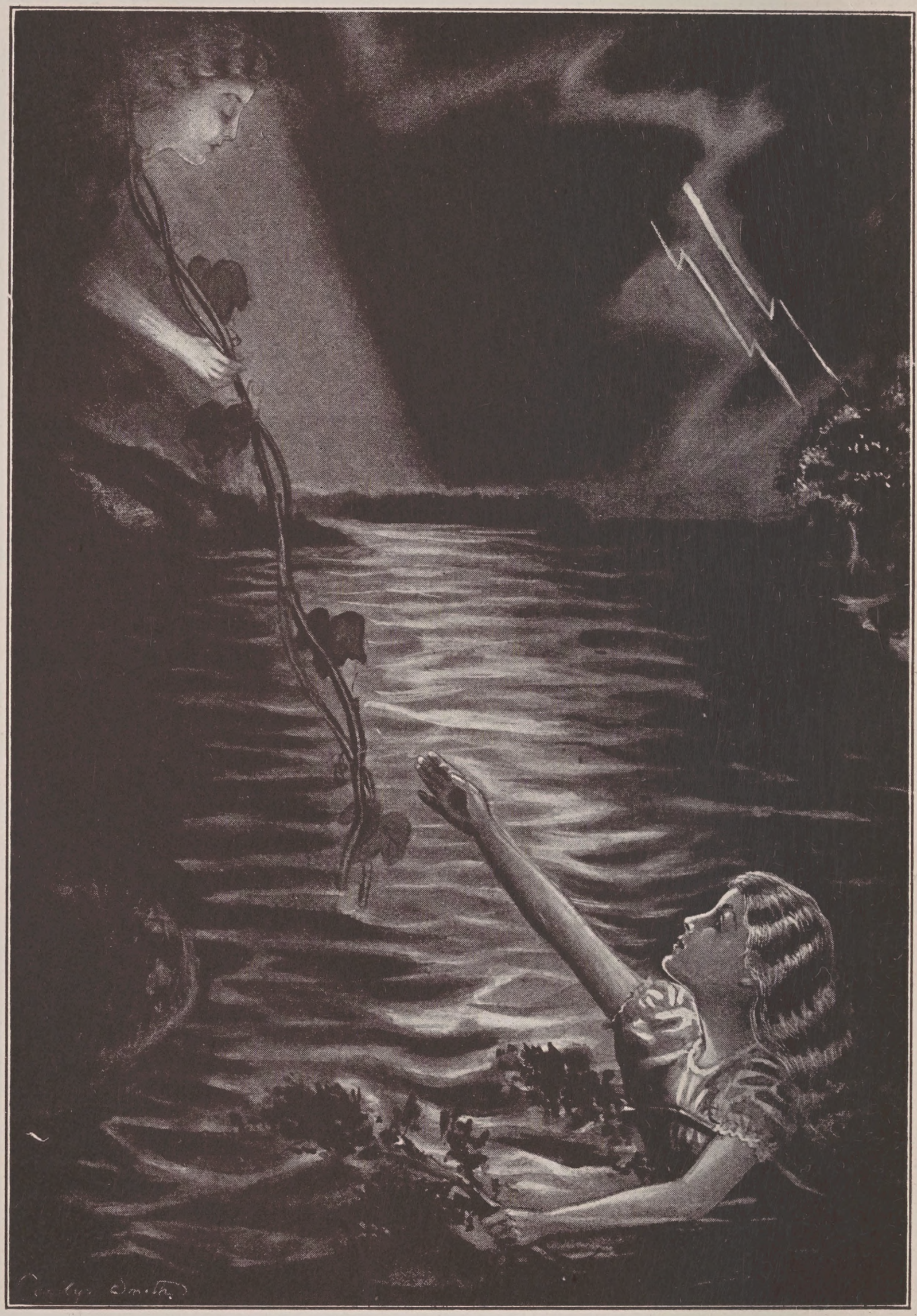
"Papa!" cried the girl, springing from the block.

"My child!" With his arms about them, he faced the crowd. "What is the highest bid, gentlemen? I will pay a thousand more. For eight years I have sought my wife and child. We are Spanish-Cuban Catholics—not negroes. I have here the record of our marriage by Father Gomez. What have I to pay?" producing a roll of bills. "What is the sum?"

"Nothing," said Bob Whitney who, with Guy de Mai had been standing at one side while this unique drama moved rapidly to a climax. "Take them—they are free."

"Free—free!" echoed the woman. "The Blessed Virgin has answered my prayer!"

"A beautiful lady away down in Georgia gave me this," said the man, exhibiting the descriptive handbill, "and I knew I had found the way."



A FACE IN THE CLOUD

Chap. XXXI

CHAPTER XXXI

A FACE IN THE CLOUD

The fury of the waters let loose by the cloud-burst had reached its climax as Luda's petition—a helpless woman's voiceless cry to Deity—died away on the massive waves of blackness without an echo. From a broken dam far up the mountain, a great log careening with fierce velocity, struck the tree to which she clung, swerving its branches farther from shore.

Face to face with unfathomable immensity, her inmost thoughts vibrated with the pulse of her throbbing temples. Suddenly a wonderful calm fell upon her. Abandoning herself to the merciless flood, she communed in silence with her own soul, and, leaning upon her Creator, became curiously resigned. In semi-unconsciousness as it were, her eyelids closed; as though locked, they could not come apart. Yet with inward vision she beheld a lambent sheen quivering upon the yellow water, brightening its surface. As the glorious shimmering continued, the very clouds seemed to sing, the winds to be subcharged with a beneficient host.

Casting her gaze heavenward, peace beyond understanding seized her as with joy indescribable she caught the source of the gleam; the dense clouds slowly opening disclosed like a bewildering sunbeam a face translucent as the halo around it, while a hand, fair, ethereal, guided the fluttering vine within her reach. Grasping its twisted fibers, she was transported to a grassy bank far above the on-rushing flood—saved by a guardian whose face

to her strangely sightless eyes had seemed but a reflection of her own.

As she was being lifted by an uncomprehensible power from the roaring waters, the providential bridge moved from under her feet, the careening log which had impelled it to swerve, veered off and an instant later was swallowed up in the seething vortex below.

True consciousness returning, Luda's eyes suddenly flew open and she looked around her in a daze, remembering only the last prayer in her hopeless heart, all else that had followed being to her memory a vague dream. How—when—was a problem to her mystified mind. After a few moments pause in which to extricate her bewildered thoughts, the weary girl struggled up the hill, exposed stones and thistles frightfully lacerating her feet. Yet a peculiar sense of safety imbued her with new strength, for she knew she was now not alone—that her surroundings vibrated with watchful souls. If one could rejoice under such circumstances, hers was an association of rejoicing.

The weird cry of hoot-owls did not startle her; the thought of wildcats, catamounts, frequenters of the densely-tangled woods, had no terrors for her. An opossum skirred past; wild boars grunted; a dove, pathetic testimonial of loneliness, called mournfully to its mate; the leaves behind rustled a suggestion that she was followed; but she had adopted as protectors the unseen friends whose whisperings mingled with the low winds.

Between her home and the point she had crossed there was no house except a cabin some two miles distant in an old maple-sugar camp, negro watch-quarters during syrup-making; and 'twas said it was haunted—that the ghost of a headless man

had been seen there—a decidedly unpleasant consideration to a lone traveler.

Emerging after a long struggle from the almost impassable wilderness of cedar and holly undergrowth, with feet sore and bleeding, limbs scratched and painful, Luda reached the maple grove. To her surprise a dim light flickered through cracks in the old clap-board door.

Fully assured that human creatures, not ghosts, must occupy the cabin, she passed through an opening in the rail fence and tapped lightly while her heart beat a series of pit-a-pats, half hope, half fear.

"Who dah—who dah?" gruffly demanded an unrecognized voice.

Numb to consequences, she rapped louder.

"Go 'way from heah. Go 'way. Wakin' folks up dis time o' night! Nothin' in dis place fur nobody."

"It's Luda Grey. May she come in?"

Stillness reigned for a moment, then the door opened a trifle. "Jis' you wait, Miss Luda. Foh de lan' sake, you is got lost, sho' nuff!"

Two of the Howard slaves had been spearing fish along the shoals when the sudden storm drove them to the nearest refuge, it being the opposite side of the river from home.

"What is you doin' out in dis storm, anyhow, Miss Luda? An' you's all by yo'self? I clah, you's as wet as watah, an' yo' alls dress is taired to pieces! Whah's you gwine sich a night? Ain't nobody wif you, atall? You skeers dis niggah mighty nigh to death, so you does."

"You mus' be 'bout dead, you sho'ly mus'," they ejaculated again and again.

At her request they lighted a torch and set out to guide her. Once in sight of home, she bade them

return, exacting from them a sworn promise never to tell under any circumstances whatever of having seen her.

Treading so lightly in her shoeless feet that none was aware of her presence, she entered the house and quickly changed the few wet rags that still clung to her, for an inconspicuous gown of dark homespun. After writing a short message, she threw herself for a moment on the bed; but no rest awaited her there. So she glanced once more in the bedroom of her parents, thinking a last good-bye; took on her arm in order to destroy them, the remnants of clothing that had withstood the flood; and placed on a small work-table the note in which she had briefly said, "I am going far away. Some day I shall return, and I hope you will all be proud of me," then, the most wretched of girls, left her home. A draught, made by the opening and closing of the door, whirled the little note from the table into the open-fireplace where the dying embers consumed it, a crisp, inkless shadow only remaining.

At the summit of the mountain where she had often climbed for Christmas greens, and sometimes hunted with Jack, Luda paused, casting a farewell look at the storm-beaten valley, viewing with pity the twisted trees, overwashed fields of grain, fenceless meadows and general devastation. The clear blue sky seemed millions of miles above, the valley below, a sea of mud, as the brilliant sun, monarch of earth, came peeping over the eastern mountain-tops.

The knowledge that she was leaving all that was dear was almost too much for her, and prostrating herself on the water-soaked earth, she repeated over and over, "Why did I not drown! Oh, why was I saved!"

The lowing kine answering the call of early morn-

ing feeders came floating up from the valley as her eyes followed the curls of blue smoke issuing from her little home chimney. For an instant only she was possessed to turn back, and in that instant she sobbed, "How can I! Oh, heartless girl that I am!" Then as if perched on some sheer cliff which forbade descent, she recognized the utter impossibility of changing the plan. "Why should I hesitate or regret when in my soul I know it is the thing to do—best for all?"

While feeling so severely her departure, yet too, she was conscious of the soothing companionship of uplifting and mysterious powers. Arising, she stood a brief moment, her two minds debating. Then, with renewed effort and undaunted courage, turning from the sight of home and all she loved therein, begging that guidance wherewith the weakest may be strong, she set out with greater determination toward the new life, her heart looking backward, her will-power urging her forward.

In time she reached the cross-roads, catching the mail-wagon for Grayson. The driver, speaking only as occasion demanded to the old sorrels, did not trouble himself to notice whether his only passenger was native or stranger. If she wept, it was to herself; if she moaned, it was stifled. The terrible sadness of her heart was not allayed by the new scenes, though inconceivably varied, before her tired eyes. From Grayson she continued her journey to Lexington and Nashville by rail, changing at the latter point for Atlanta; where, on arriving, she was in a daze, scarcely believing it could be her real self. She lingered in the waiting-room to examine her way-map so deftly arranged by Nathalie, hoping to learn definitely the distance of the school from the city. As she nervously unrolled Nathalie's package, the wrapping fluttered to the floor; she

noticed it was the handbill of the Whitney sale and bore date September twenty-fifth, three days hence. Ages seemed to have passed since she had left the Big Sandy behind.

Voices outside the window attracted her. "We'll go to this sale near Savannah and if I do not find my precious ones—oh, what *shall* I do! Must I give them up. Finding no trace there, Pedro, I shall not believe they were taken on the pirate boat and sold as slaves, but were swept away by the waves."

"Another who knows grief," passed through the lonely girl's mind, as, curiously interested, she arose and caught sight of two men whom she took for foreigners.

"Do not despair, my boy. This war scare will doubtless cause more sales of slaves than ever before, and I still believe you will locate them. The planter is shrewd, and will seek every opportunity to rid himself of this class of property now."

"Here's our train. Come."

Without knowing what impelled her, Luda picked up the Whitney handbill, all stained by the muddy water of the Big Sandy, and held it out of the window. Deferentially lifting their hats, the men accepted it and boarded the train just pulling out.

Taking a conveyance from the station, she quickly reached Miss Carter's school. The principal, a woman of unusual culture, acute understanding, after a careful perusal of Nathalie's letter, welcomed her graciously, noting in her face of harmonious features a certain radiance of inner soul that fascinated her. The pupils, however, daughters of wealthy southerners, received her very differently, her peculiar style provoking no little comment among them. Suitable apparel was at once ordered, but, unfortunately, first impressions had

been formed. Luda's self-designed dress, home-made and of inexpensive material, had passed without remark among her associates in the Sandy Valley, save that it set her apart from others, as did also the peculiar charm of her conversation and daily life at which many marveled. That mere clothes should constitute an additional barrier to her happiness, was a source of embarrassment to Luda, yet she heroically endeavored to appear at ease in the conventional uniform. The teacher rather liked the picturesque dress, regarding it as exceptionally fitted to the girl's oriental type, but, to save criticism, thought it might be wiser for her also to conform to the custom. Observing later, however, that the change quite robbed the strangely-interesting girl of self-possession and naturalness, rendering her in some way awkward, Miss Carter compromised, insisting only on change in material and color. And thereafter Luda Grey, draped in gowns a la Recamier, became an object of admiration, a picturesquely pleasing acquisition to the aristocratic seminary for girls.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BETROTHAL OF MISS LILA-LILY

While Luda was ardently throwing herself in the school work in an effort to banish homesickness, and praying to forget the man who had stabbed her poor heart in more ways than one, the Big Sandy Valley was taking on its Autumnal garment of flaming hues, October suffusing the leaves with a new gorgeousness.

Each day Nathalie Downing grew weaker. Topics that might distress her were avoided, newspapers kept religiously out of her reach, and Lincoln's name was never spoken in her presence. Born and reared in Baltimore, the daughter of a slave-holder, she was naturally in sympathy with Secession.

On pleasant days Rush took the now-confirmed invalid out in a wheeled chair. While shaving or otherwise assisting his master in making his toilet mornings, he would often talk of her, it being evident she spoke to him of a future life. "Marse Guy, Miss Nathalie is moh like de angels den rale people. She tell 'bout de good Lawd till ye mos' sees Him right foh yo' face an' eyes. It'll jes' break dis niggah's heart ef she die, so hit will. Cain't you-all do nothin' to save Miss Nathalie? Dis niggah pray fer her day an' night, suh."

A supreme calmness covered the countenance of the master who, though making no reply, was deeply touched by the simple adoration thus displayed by this illiterate servant for the angelic girl he had chosen for his wife.

Although his heart was scarred with sorrow at Luda Grey's untimely death, and he truly mourned the one already gone, he did not forget his duty to the living—to her who had inspired in him a profound affection; and a strange numbness seized his brain as purple waves floated before his tearless eyes.

All hearts at Ivywild were stirred to the depths when the doctor held out no hope for Nathalie. Her brother, quietly leaving the sick-chamber, wandered alone among the shrubbery. Covering his face with his hands in an abandonment to grief, he threw himself on the leaf-strewn bank, where, impelled by sympathy, the fair Lily seated herself beside him.

"Our beautiful Nathalie!" he exclaimed. "How can I give her up! Mother can never stand the separation—never."

Lily, who had hitherto mercilessly teased him, keeping him continually in suspense as to her identity, endeavored now to sooth him and spoke in terms of endearment. The spirit of mischief entirely disappeared, and she could not resist when, there on the blue-green grass that nestled at the water's edge, he drew her head with its glory of chestnut-brown hair to his heaving bosom.

"One word only will help me—not to forget, but to endure—one word that will comfort me, Lily—your answer to-day to my repeated request—become a daughter to my broken-hearted parents—be my wife."

The consolatory "yes" was no longer deferred, and there on the banks of the picturesque river, under a sky changing from pink and golden tints to azure, Lily de Mai agreed to sever the bonds of twinship, to dream her inmost dreams with a chosen one.

Oblivious to all else in this moment of mutual surrender they did not hear the approach of Ned and Claudia Howard, who of late had ridden over daily to inquire after Nathalie. Ned took in the situation at a glance, and Lily, extending her left hand on which gleamed the token of future oneness, said seriously, "Forgive me, Ned, I promise not to—well, I'm going to confide to you the only known method of distinguishing Lila and me. See," putting her hand to her forehead, "Lila has two distinct cowlicks; I have only one. So, hereafter, be right. Oh, ours isn't the only affair that is settled, is it, Ned?"

Words were unnecessary, for Ned's face flushed the answer a hundredfold.

Lila having joined them, Claudia left the couples to their self-sufficiency and pursued her way to the sick-chamber. Since Luda's disappearance Claudia had become greatly subdued; and the invalid sought to interest her with incidents of her own girlhood, accounts of her studies, and of the hours spent at West Point, including confidences as to her hopes and affections.

The succeeding hazy days of Autumn found Nathalie stronger, and when the engagements of Lila-Lily were announced, her apparent improvement added to the general joyousness; while her laugh was as merry as that of the twins themselves when on hearing of the engagement of Ruth Louns to Dr. Hamilton, one ejaculated, "About time, I should say!"

"Her letter doesn't state when they are to be married. In another hundred years, I suppose," cried the other.

"Why, Ruth is getting to be an old maid! And do you know, they've been exactly four years, six months and a day becoming engaged! Miss Lila-

Lily didn't wait like that. No siree!" Catching each other around the waist the mischief-loving twins executed a home-grown jig to the amusement of all.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LUDA'S OFFERING

While rejoicing in Luda's devotion to study, Miss Carter regretted that she persisted in holding herself aloof from the other students. Yet there was a sort of poetic harmony even in this, as in every action of the singularly graceful girl.

She had made one confidential friend only—an English girl whose family had recently moved from the East to Tennessee. This friend was also unpopular, because perhaps of her pronounced northern sympathies. Drawn to each other by a common embarrassment, Luda Grey and Millie Delancey often strolled together in the grove of the academy or in surrounding fields and woods. One Sunday afternoon, going farther than usual, they found in a sheltered dale a mass of late blossoms semi-tropical in its wild profusion, a sort of crowning effort of nature.

It was a lovely, quiet spot, and the girls lingered, gathering only the choicest. For some reason Luda felt strangely moved. Though no one but Millie was near, she heard a call—someone spoke her name.

"We are robbing the virgin forest, and some power is rising in protest, Millie dear," she said, half-jestingly.

Failing to divine her meaning, Millie laughingly responded, "Then we had better depart before that unknown power overtakes us."

Returning to the house, Luda placed her flowers in water, and seating herself by the window watched the changing sky whereon, as upon a great

sea, sailed galleons of whitest clouds. Somewhat fatigued—the ramble having been longer than usual—a peculiar sense of drowsiness came over her, gently sealing her eyes.

"Come. Bring the flowers. Nathalie calls," said a voice. And instantly Luda was translated to the Sandy Valley—to Ivywild, where, upon a snow-white bed, her eyes closing to things of earth, opening to things eternal, lay her benefactress, glorious Nathalie.

As if cognizant of her presence, the face of the dying girl brightened while about her fell a soft, moving mist out of which, perfectly visible to Luda, appeared angelic beings. Transfused in this filmy vapor, in form and semblance as she had known her in all her ethereal beauty yet with a more divine loveliness, Luda beheld the passing soul of Nathalie Downing supported by the visitant band.

As Millie Delancey's voice broke across her consciousness, Luda opened her eyes and looked about her doubtfully. Her heart thrilled as her mind recalled the scene she had just witnessed, and which seemed too real to be merely a dream.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GOD'S ETERNAL SPRING

His daughter having another relapse toward the end of the month, Judge Downing requested her attending physician to call in consultation the eminent specialist, Dr. Andrews, of Charleston, who, at the patient's urgent plea to be informed as to her exact condition, replied, "An attempt to deceive you would be futile, Miss Downing, since you have, I believe, divined the truth."

Late the following Sunday Nathalie called her loved ones to her room and told them of her conversation with Dr. Andrews. "But I knew already," she said with a smile, a magical light enveloping her, while the atmosphere stirred, seeming to proclaim a mystic depth of serene intelligence around her. Casting her gaze upward whence emanated the radiance, an expression of golden peace came into her eyes, as if they rested upon a heavenly mirage and she said, "This morning at sunrise, music most divine filled my room, and then it must have been my guardian angel who spoke to me, 'At the approach of the next twilight, Nathalie, we will come for you.'" Her pure spirit upborne by trust supreme glowed through the lovely face enshrouded by a new softness.

"Do not think of me as dead—sleeping in a grave of earth; but rather as one whose hope has become a living reality." With loving tenderness, she made disposition of her worldly possessions, giving most of her jewels to Lily, who would take her place in the home.

She then asked to be left alone with Guy who,

with head bowed low, knelt at her bedside as the others withdrew.

"Guy dear," she said, tenderly smoothing his hair with her delicate fingers, "Nathalie must leave you, and her wish is to comfort you in your approaching loneliness."

"Oh Nathalie, I beg of you, do not say *must!*"

"I love you with the sort of affection that death will only strengthen, Guy. And by the intensity of that love, I want from you a promise which will, I believe, be to you and to one whom you also, loved, lifelong consolation."

"There is nothing you can ask I will not grant, but oh, spare me this separation, dear, dear Nathalie," he replied, suppressing as best he could his overwrought emotions.

She looked him straight in the eyes as he raised his face to hers. "Listen to me Guy, for what I am about to say will no doubt surprise even you. I do not believe as you and the others, that Luda Grey was drowned. I well know your passion for her—a passion which, try as you would, you had not the power to conquer. Therefore I cannot find it in my heart to blame you. I loved her also. And now I want your promise that you will seek her, and if you find her, give her the place you intended for me—make her your wife."

For the moment Guy gazed at her in wonderment, while the query in his mind was, could she be conscious of what she was saying—was she semi-delirious? That Luda Grey lived to-day, that she had passed safely through the fearful storm that night, was beyond his most hopeful belief. But he would not even think of making an effort to dissuade Nathalie from what he considered merely a delusion of the mind. Besides, Luda's disap-

pearance had never been particularly dwelt upon in the presence of the sick girl.

Clasping more closely the wasted hand, he pressed a kiss on the colorless brow, and when he had regained control of himself, said tenderly, "You are my hope, Nathalie—my inspiration. Your words shall be 'a lamp unto my path.'"

As was his daily practice, Dr. Hampton called for a brief prayer in the sick-chamber. The rays of the departing sun gilded the mountain pines and multi-colored oaks above the valley, casting shadows over Ivywild, as Nathalie's loved ones and the de Mai family gathered at her bedside. The pastor spoke soothingly to her, saying he had prayed that she might yet be touched by the hand of Him who is able to heal all ills, if in His love and wisdom it were best.

"I have no fear of death—no wish to remain in this body—and I shall pass quickly through the shadow. The light begins to dawn."

"The sustaining grace of God; a divine hope—a triumphant faith!" said the minister, raising his hands.

Nathalie's lips repeated his prayer, and when he had risen, in renewed voice that seemed to reach beyond the pale of earth and earthly things, she began that hymn of promise, "I'm going home to die no more." Though her eyes evinced the wish that all join her in the song, the pastor alone was able, himself seeming fairly hypnotized by unseen witnesses.

Still kneeling by the bed, Guy's hand met the invalid's firm clasp, as with a smile she spoke of masses of beautiful flowers about the room. Lifting her gaze in the direction of the soft, white draperies about the high-posted bed, Nathalie's spiritual eyes must have opened to the sublime possibilities of

continued life after casting off the body, for with a flash of recognition, a smile illumining her peaceful countenance, she whispered:

"They have come!"

So, in mid-Autumn, with the falling of prophetic leaves, Nathalie Downing's soul passed through the Winter of death, even unto the ineffable glory of God's eternal Spring.

CHAPTER XXXV

FREE

Guy de Mai's first vote had been cast on the winning side; Abraham Lincoln was president-elect. Excitement ran high, and there was much comment, the one most generally heard being, "The South is becoming too hot for men with northern sympathies." During this time of suspense the sale of Ivywild was completed, and the de Mai men rejoiced in the knowledge that they were soon to l ave bickerings and dangerous discussions behind, while the hearts of the women of the household were filled with sadness as they made preparations to depart forever from the home they loved so dearly. Perhaps the hardest task was their effort to assuage the grief of the blacks who did not doubt for a moment that they were to be sold as had been the Whitney and Moore slaves. That their master might free them was undreamed of by them, and, lest they should unintentionally frustrate his plans, he dared not enlighten them. Gathering in their log meeting-house, they prayed long and fervently. They told the Lord how they loved the old massa and missus; that they didn't want to be separated from each other; imploring Him earnestly to lead them through their tribulations. "O Lawd," one prayed hysterically, "don' send yo' po' chillun away from dis place dat is heben hitself!" Then more calmly, as if in full belief his request would be granted, "You ain't gwine ter, is ye, good Brudder Lawd?"

"You jis' sot down dah, Mose," another cried. "Youse gwine plum crazy, so ye is. Let Bruddah

Jabe pray what's bettah 'quainted wid de Lawd den you is. You tells de Lawd dis place is heben, an' He'll be 'sulted, kase He knows dis is jis' a place fo' sinnahs to prepah; an' you goin' on dat a way talkin' to de big Massa in de sky!"

The wenches performed their duties in a dazed, uncertain manner; or, hugging each other in abject misery, rocked to and fro, weeping and moaning that they should never see one another again.

Having occasion to go to his room, Guy found Rush on his knees, praying and sobbing piteously, "O Lawd, dis niggah am 'bout dead, sho' as yoah bo'n."

"What's the trouble, Rush?"

"Oh Marse Guy, youse all gwine 'way an' sell ole Rush; an' dis po' niggah's heart is broke short off, an' he jis' cain't stan' hit to go 'way from you all, Marse Guy, why you gwine ter sell us an' de hosses? I jis' jump in de river, so I will," looking his master piteously in the face. "Marse Guy, don' do hit, don' do hit."

"You old fool! Get up and wash your black face and stop that whining."

"Joe Johnston dun say how we's gwine ter be all sold up——"

"I tell you you're not going to be sold, so Joe doesn't know. Now whistle a bit. There, you look better."

"Marse Guy, you ain't funnin', is yer? Don' fool dis ole niggah, kase he cain't stan' no mo'—no mo'."

Somewhat comforted, Rush—who had earned his name when a boy from his rushing instantly into everything he was directed to do—rose laboriously and made an attempt to whistle, finishing, however, with a tremulous sigh. "Cain't do hit no mo', Marse. No use tryin'. Cain't whistle an' sing no mo' in dis

wo'ld. All de pucker is dun gone outen' dis mouf, for sho', Marse Guy."

"Then it serves you right. The idea of whimpering like an old fool when everybody else is at work! Now come along and get some things out of the store-room for me. I tell you you'll be ruined forever if you lose that pucker; so you'd better get it back."

The afternoon previous to their departure, grandma, Mrs. de Mai and the twins took a farewell stroll about the place. As they passed through the quarters it required all the self-restraint they could command, not to reassure the panic-stricken blacks by confessing the truth.

The negroes, with forebodings of separations, ate their evening meal in silence. Toward dusk the major went to the cabins and ordered them to collect their clothes and bedding, and, taking whatever was necessary for comfort, be out of sight of Ivy-wild by daybreak. They were stunned, gazing at their master in mute appeal.

"You know where the boats are. Pole to the junction around the point. Your freedom is at stake; and my plans might fail if any slave-runner should meet you this side of Ohio. But should anyone attempt to stop you, tell them you are my servants, going ahead of the family to the new home; if suspected of running away, you would be captured. You will be met, and housed on my farm. Get the boats off soon after midnight."

A weird scene followed. Dark shadows flitted stealthily from cabin to cabin, finally forming into a procession of dusky pilgrims with burdens of various shapes and sizes wrapped in bags or blankets, and marching silently to the water's edge. Heretofore their oars had been stroked to the beat of some happy plantation melody, but now fear

closed their lips while they floated noiselessly down the Big Sandy.

Guy was sorry, yet glad to leave Ivywild; sorry to bid farewell to the familiar haunts of his boyhood; glad to depart for a time from the scenes of his two-fold sorrow.

It was not until the family arrived at the new home that they learned of the adventures while floating to freedom of their slaves who numbered one less than when they left Ivywild. When about half the distance they had been hailed from the Virginia shore by two men with a pack of hounds on the track of a runaway negro. The dogs set up a howl, and frightened almost out of their senses the de Mai slaves poled faster. The rear boat swerved and a bundle rolled into the water; attempting to catch it, eleven-year-old Rufus fell overboard. It was all they could do to restrain the child's mother from plunging after him. The polemen dared not stop, even had not the swiftness of the current prevented; so when the youngster came spluttering to the surface, the boat was a great deal further away. The negro-hunters, brandishing horse-pistols, swore at the oarsmen and ordered them to pull in. But the terrified slaves disregarded them and, minus poor Rufus, pursued their course to and across what has been called the Mason and Dixon Line.

When later the major gave to each of his slaves a paper of manumission, a curious scene followed. They were absolutely incapable of comprehending changed conditions, appearing helpless and hopeless as they stood bewildered, their black fingers clutching their legal voucher of freedom.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CAPTAIN GUY DE MAI

The fourth of March had come and gone. Lincoln had been inaugurated president, and the nation's heart throbbed with increasing suspense, culminating with the firing on Sumter.

Having enlisted at an early call, Guy de Mai received orders to report at Columbus, where he was commissioned to organize and assume command of a company of volunteers with headquarters at Ceredo, West Virginia, near the mouth of the Big Sandy. This company subsequently became a part of the Fifth Virginia Regiment, and later on was attached to the division under General Rosencranz which finally amalgamated with the Army of the Potomac.

It was a time of great activity all over the country. The sound of fife and drum was heard at every turn, school-houses and town-halls were converted into barracks and enlistment stations, public places generally being utilized for drilling troops in methods of war.

Excitement beggared description when the soldiers departed for the front, Captain de Mai's regiment with others embarking at Ironton, Ohio. And as the band played:

> "We'll rally round the flag, boys,
> We'll rally once again,
> Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom!"

flying the red, white and blue and loaded to the water's edge with Ohio's brave men and boys (for

it seemed not one old enough to bear a gun had been left behind) the boats backed from the wharf and floated slowly down the stream. Overcome at the—perhaps final—separation, mothers, wives, sisters, sweethearts, succumbed to passionate weeping. *Lawrence County mourned.*

CHAPTER XXXVII

A DAY TO BE REMEMBERED

During the first few months at school Luda Grey not only found her powers taxed to the utmost in acquainting herself with the use of books and preparing recitations, but in addition she experienced the embarrassment incident to sudden social elevation. That she was a genius had not occurred to her own mind, yet her teachers were attracted by her quick perception and a strange underlying ability. To learn lessons was the easiest of her tasks, for in some way she had known them before; but to others how this could be they did not understand, unless it was a manifestation of some previous intelligence or knowledge. Joy and melancholy each had their part in her moods. Sometimes her expression was rapt as if she were filled with ecstatic awe; again, it was tinged with tragedy, that of the one love in her soul.

Miss Carter, ardently desiring the success of her singular pupil, overestimated Luda's strength, and the termination of the first year found the girl quite exhausted; so much so that the preceptress, believing in the wonderful efficacy of a few weeks back to Nature, encouraged her to accept Millie Delancey's invitation to spend the vacation with her at Rose-Crest among the odorous pines of the foot-hills of historic Lookout. And there amid the luxurious surroundings of her friend's magnificent home, with slaves at hand to do one's bidding, and with rest and recreation happily combined, she was so restored that she became in her renewed vivaciousness the very sunshine of the household. The

girls had many pleasant drives in the vicinity of Lookout Mountain along picturesque streams and through grand, dense woods. The one most memorable and beautiful occurred on the first Sabbath of her stay. The atmosphere was hazy over the western horizon, low, fleecy clouds now and then obscuring the quivering tree-tops. A slender rivulet gushed from a deep, almost buried spring at the foot of a grassy mound; and though July was at hand it was temptingly cool in the hollows and shaded woods. The undergrowth and dwarf trees covered with wild-rose vines in abundant bloom resembled huge bouquets; the perfume of wild honeysuckle and sweet-william blossoms mingling with that of the rose permeated the air vibrant with the song of vari-tinted birds. Fascinated with the beauty of the woodlands, Luda suggested that they alight for a stroll. Under the mandrake's broad green leaves that carpeted the earth, lay bushels of ripe yellow May-apples, which recalled her mother's fondness for that delicious fruit. Leading in an opposite direction from the hiding-places of their young, partridges disported themselves at a safe distance; daintily-speckled wild pheasants darted here and there, cackling in fear lest their nests be molested.

To Luda's mind unseen presences were near; she felt gentle touches, loving embraces, heard breathings and whisperings as if voices welcomed her to this peaceful domain. When she bent the branches, invisible hands apparently grasped the flowers; when she passed a faded blossom, it took on renewed life and fragrance. And withal there spread before her mind's eye a wonderful scene—a mirage of a darkened little home in the valley of the Big Sandy—her home; but it being her constant habit to suppress all such sensations within her own

soul, she said nothing to her companion of the strange picture.

Delighted with their outing, the girls returned just as supper was announced. Guests were expected for the evening, and Luda hurriedly changed her dress. So averse had she grown to meeting strangers, it was with misgivings she entered the grand old-fashioned drawing-room. To her surprise, however, the evening proved a decidedly pleasant one, Millie's handsome brother devoting himself to her assiduously. His rich tenor voice blending with the mezzo-soprano touched a responsive chord in her heart, giving her that exquisite joy that a soul attuned to nature finds in musical harmony.

Time passed more slowly after her return to school. Thoughts of home and wonderings about Guy and Nathalie filled her with forebodings. She tried to forget; and threw herself into her studies with greater zeal, supposing that long ere this her benefactress and Guy must have been married. At the end of this year she had made most satisfactory progress and had daily become more reconciled to her surroundings. She was, besides, so improved in health that she determined to spend the vacation in study, thereby to gain ground in every possible way. So she went to Atlanta and took up languages with a Spanish lady sojourning in that city. There she had also the opportunity of meeting highly cultured people of the best southern type, as well as a coterie of distinguished foreigners.

On returning to Carter Seminary, her position had greatly changed for the better; she was recognized as one of the brightest in her classes and was accorded a place among the most popular students, some important part being invariably assigned her at the Friday evening entertainments. To one of these school socials there came among

other guests from the city, Mr. Louns, a young soldier who had just enlisted in the Confederate Army as a non-commissioned officer. His constant attentions to Miss Grey left no doubt as to what was the attraction that led him to Carter Seminary. When introduced as a friend of Madame Olivares, by Luda, he made no effort to conceal from the popular principal his infatuation for her brilliant pupil, declaring that he would always retain the memory of her voice, the light and shade of her face, and her singular beauty as she had recited an original verse.

"Like her poem, Miss Grey is herself fascinatingly mysterious," he said, "her words seeming to flow from some inexhaustible fountain."

Considering it most important that Luda should not become interested in aught else before having finished her education, Miss Carter was not sorry that he came to no more of the entertainments. That his marked attentions were discontinued was not the fault of Mr. Louns, however, the exigencies of war having called him speedily away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"A LETTER FROM GUY—AND HE IS DEAD"

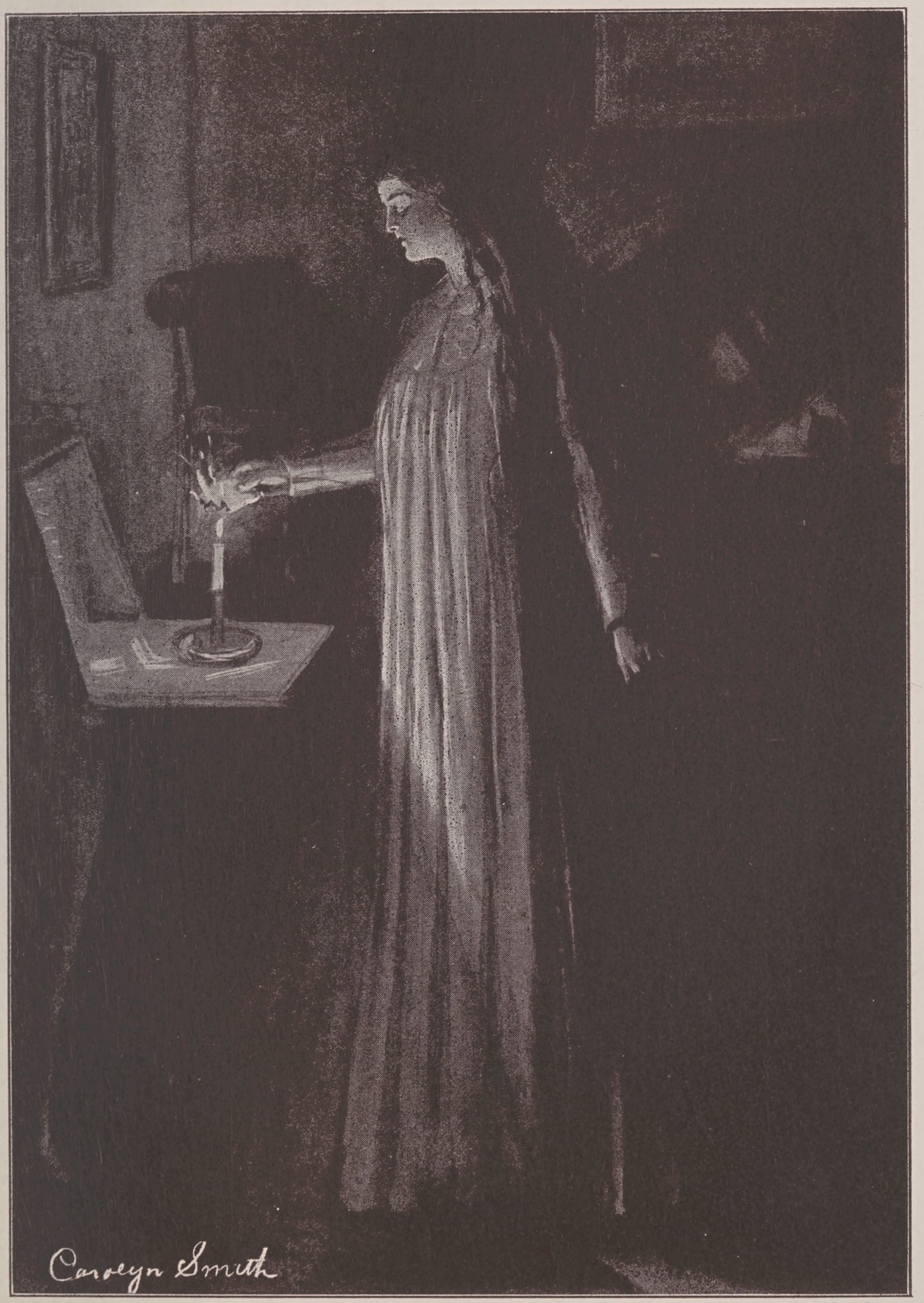
The following year Luda resumed her course in languages, further availing herself of the social advantages to be found in Atlanta—incomparable blessing to the lonely girl for her heart, so closed to happiness, had never wavered in its devotion to Guy de Mai. Although she had heard not one word since she left home, she could not believe otherwise than that he had married Nathalie. She was confident too that he would be fighting in the army of the North, for time and again she had as in visions seen him in its uniform.

Scanning a list of casualties in the newspaper one day, her eye fell upon the words, "Guy de Mai, a brave young captain, killed at Gettysburg."

Instantly everything in the room seemed possessed with life and, like her head, to be reeling round and round. Grasping at the nearest chair she sank to her knees beside it, burying her face in her trembling hands. She could not think, the world and everything it contained, became void to her. The greatest of sorrows had overtaken her. The earth was so empty, for the light of her life had gone out. Although she had resigned herself to the irrevocable fact that Guy belonged to Nathalie, yet she believed him the ideal of all that was noble, brave and true.

"Ah, poor Nathalie!" she said to herself later on, "the brilliance of noon-day sun that was yours is darkened now—to shine no more."

The day's post brought her a letter from Herbert Delancey. He had written often since Luda's visit



SUITING THE DEED TO THE THOUGHT

Chap XXXVIII.

to Rose Crest, but the correspondence had been somewhat desultory on her part; from the start she had endeavored to hold his attentions to her on the plane of mere brotherly courtesy shown to his sister's dearest friend.

Her mind far, far away, even to the field of Gettysburg where lay in cold death the one love of her life, she opened Mr. Delancey's letter with little interest. To her great surprise it contained a declaration of the writer's undying affection and a proposal for her hand in marriage.

"I have inherited an extensive property near London, dear Miss Grey," he wrote, "and my family will return with me at no late date—every member of whom would rejoice at your consent to accompany us. The beginning of this letter expresses but inadequately the depth of my love for you; and the close can contain no more than a suggestion of how proud I would be to sail from these shores with the most charming, most beautiful girl in America for my bride. I beg you not to consider my request lightly, but to believe me most sincere in my affection for you."

Though this was the first real love-letter Luda Grey had ever received, it caused her no elation. She continued to repeat in a dull monotone, "My hopes are forever darkened. What does anything matter now? Guy, dead, dead! Oh, the sting of death—not to him—but to me!" She again buried her face in her hands, but shed no tear, her heart was too stunned, her grief too deep for outward manifestation. Even though she had resigned him to Nathalie, the whisperings to her heart had in some way kept her happy.

As Delancey had pleaded for an immediate response, Luda summoned courage later that day and sat down at her desk to thank him for the honor he

had accorded her. She told him of her ambitions—her greatest desire being to finish her education, thereafter to give herself wholly to missionary work. While penning the lines a new thought came to her mind: As the wife of a man of wealth might she not be enabled to accomplish even more in that line than she could ever hope to do alone? So, moved by impulse, she wrote him: "Marriage in my estimation, Mr. Delancey, is as sacred as heaven itself, and in giving the hand, the heart with its every pulsation should respond. I could not say at this writing that my heart would ever respond to yours. But if, in future—say at the end of another year—your feelings toward me have undergone no change, if you still believe you could be happy with me, and in the meantime my present regard for you should deepen to an affection worthy of your acceptance, I *may* consider your proposal. Until that time—and thanking you from the deepest recesses of my heart for the greatest compliment man gives to woman—I am, indeed your friend, Luda Grey."

She addressed and sealed the letter, ready to post, yet was far from happy in the contemplation of her act. Though inspired by unselfish ambition, something accused her; she feared that she had yielded to the voice of the tempter, sacrificed her womanly instincts, been untrue to her better self and false to the very principles she had advocated all her life.

Falling apparently into a restless sleep after the midnight hour, Luda received another message—not by post—by Amarita who had brought light to her heart in many of her darkest sorrows. It was from Guy, and consisted of four lines. The words were as plainly visible, as distinctly traced as were those in the letter which came that day

from Herbert Delancey. She read and re-read them: "I want the right to stand by you—in your joys, in your sorrows, and in danger. I love you."

Far in the distance she beheld a battlefield—Guy in uniform, his head against a bullet-riddled tree, between him and herself vast waves of impassible mists ebbed and flowed. Hurriedly burying their dead comrades, soldiers, awaiting further orders, reverently covered the face of the officer with a blanket which he thrust aside, and perceiving he still lived, they bore him away.

"Promise," said a tender voice, and Luda awoke with a start, tears stealing into her eyes, her lips framing the name, "Nathalie!" Indeed, so vividly had Nathalie stood by her bedside that Luda turned again and again, unable to persuade herself she had not actually seen her in real life.

When fully aroused, her mind reverted to the dream. "A letter from Guy—and he is dead! His words to me under the sycamore—dear Nathalie's last words, too! Ah, they do not approve of the letter I have written to Herbert Delancey."

Springing from bed she seized the envelope ready for posting, and exclaiming, "I will destroy it!" suited the deed to the thought, lighted her candle, and, holding the letter at arm's length, watched it ignite, flame and consume.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"WOULDN'T I DO TO SKEER WIF?"

From time to time during his career as a soldier, Guy de Mai was lauded as a gay young hero. On the contrary, he personally was discouraged and morose, and had it not been for enforced activity of army life he would no doubt have been utterly miserable at times. His name appeared in the list of killed at Gettysburg, yet he was only wounded; and the wound, not a dangerous one, he was later granted leave of absence, and returned home, where among his loved ones and with careful nursing, he soon started on the way to recovery, and ere long was driving about with his pretty sisters.

Southern Ohio had its sensation in the guerilla raid of Morgan, and Lila-Lily often related personal experiences of this episode of the war in which old men, boys, and some women, armed with farm implements, pistols, any old thing to kill with, waited at the river's edge to kill Morgan as he landed in Ohio. In return Guy entertained Lila-Lily with thrilling accounts of his personal engagements, such as the Lynchburg raid when mules cut from gun wagons and caissons, and mounted by soldiers would run round and round in a panic when separated from their mates; or neighing, would refuse to proceed a step until side by side as if in harness again.

Promoted to colonel, Guy was attached upon recovery to a new regiment which eventually became part of Sherman's command on his famous march to the sea. He was greatly amused the day before his departure on overhearing a conversation be-

tween black Rush and Lorenzo, employed ex-slaves.

"Now, look heah, niggah, dis yer thing is jis' gone long 'nuff, I tells ye. Dah is po' Marse Guy an' all de Ohio an' Sandy boys too, gone to de wah to be killed. An' dis niggah is gwine too; sho' as yo're bohn, he is."

"You big fool," ha-ha-ed Lorenzo. "No niggah ain't wanted in dis yer wah. De rebels would be so gusted seein' you dah, dey sholy shoot you like a ole possum. De niggah's is what dey's fightin' 'bout, man. Don' yer know nothin'? De No'th's jealous kase dey hain't got no niggahs, an' dey's gwine ter take 'em all 'way frum evahbody."

The opposition did not stagger Rush's lusty patriotism. "Yaas, dat's de truf; dey is fightin' 'bout de niggah—an' dat's why I's gwine ter give 'em one mo' to fight 'bout."

Afterward, confiding to "Marse Guy" his determination, Rush felt sadly crestfallen on being reminded that he was too old to fight. Whistling mournfully a moment, he was cheered by a clever idea.

"Den, Marse Kun'l, wouldn't I do to skeer wif?"

CHAPTER XL

A PEN-PICTURE

When Miss Grey arrived for her Spanish lesson, Madame Olivares laid aside her pen, folded the sheet and looking up with a smile of greeting, exclaimed, "The picture is incomplete." For, though the letter just written to a former pupil in France contained a keen analysis of Luda's personality and character, the teacher felt that she had not really done justice to her charming subject.

"And, dear Monsieur de la Montagne, I must tell you about an American girl in Atlanta who interests me so much. A princess in bearing, tall, slender, willowy, with a rare attractiveness. Her low, wide forehead, marble-like, with here and there a curl falling gracefully over it; almond-shaped, red-brown eyes that penetrate one's inmost soul—their long, dark lashes sweeping the cheeks. Though ordinarily pale, when animated a lovely pink blends with the firm whiteness of her skin. Between the red lips of her pretty mouth gleam teeth that rival in luster the pearls surrounding a heart-shaped locket that she constantly wears. This locket—which contains miniature likenesses of two children, a boy and a girl, the latter curiously like herself, is intrinsically valuable enough to be coveted by the favorite of a king. Since she does not prize the jewels for their worth, I fancy they have some mysterious significance unknown even to her. She reads French, Spanish, German, with the appreciation of a cosmopolitan; with superior comprehension she peruses the most difficult classics; in some unexplained manner they they are surely not alto-

gether new to her. There is in her make-up an undeniable nobility of purpose, giving one the impression of a soul living at once on earth and in heaven. In her presence I have a strange feeling of nearness to some indefinable power, and a most heavenly atmosphere surrounds both my mental and physical being. In Europe she would be called dangerously beautiful, yet the essence of soul-love and purity shines in her innocent eyes. To me she is a duality, and I can but marvel, because in contradiction of every law of psychics and psychology, she is of most humble birth; besides, her school work or education consists of less than three years application to study."

Under the training of the two Summer courses at Atlanta Luda's advancement had been pronounced phenomenal; and Madame Olivares encomiums were well deserved, particularly as to her linguistic attainments.

On her return to the seminary late in the Autumn, Luda found the minds of teachers and pupils saturated with the all-absorbing topic of war. Though she had frequently listened to arguments from both points of view relating to the questions at issue, she had formed no definite opinion. To her, war meant blighted hopes, broken hearts, ruined homes. With sympathy for the North, she loved the South with its noble hospitality, its stalwart sons and flower-like daughters. Since the one dearest on earth to her had laid down his life at Gettysburg, she had no personal interest in the success of either side.

Hitherto the death-dealing, blood-spilling conflict had raged afar; but suddenly the scene shifted; fighting drew near; the people of Georgia and the Tennessee Valley were beginning to experience their share of sorrow and danger, to see their heroic

sons cut down like wheat before the reaper. Carter Seminary could not remain unscathed, for war's distressing deprivations were driving the southern girls to their homes—or rather to the remnants of what were homes before the armies left desolation in their wake.

Hoping to beguile her weary mind, Luda took a book to her room late one afternoon and settled herself on the couch with her head toward the window. Change of scene, change of occupation, began to appear desirable to her as she read of a mission to Palestine in connection with which a disappointed, heart-wrecked woman from the English court had found peace in ministering to others. This appealed to the religious side of Luda's nature. She, too, longed to visit the Holy Land, to view Jerusalem; to behold the little town of Bethlehem, to tread the Garden of Gethsemane. But soon the book fell upon her breast, while her long lashes drooped over the weary eyes. She slept.

"Come," whispered Amarita, "come; see others bear the cross."

Out upon the shimmering air they floated to a wondrous mountain garden. On a stony way, multitudes ascended, each bearing a heavy cross. As the pilgrims, tired and sore, attained the summit of the mountain, each cross crumbled—a tracing of ashes, as it were, remaining.

Linked in each other's embrace, Luda and Amarita descended into the valley. Lifting their gaze heavenward, the dissipated crosses had re-assumed form, while supported by them, the rejuvenated multitude floated in triumph high above the swiftly-moving clouds.

"The burden of yesterday becomes the bearer of the soul set free to-day," said the guide.

The soft winds spread flaky mists about and,

sailing with myriads of messenger-souls, Luda, in a chariot of vapor, was brought back to the burdened life of the world.

As the thud of her book falling to the floor awakened her, with a pang of self-reproach on finding how late it was, she sprang to her feet. Recalling that Miss Carter had asked to see her in the evening, she hurried to the teacher's private apartment, where she was informed that it had been determined to discontinue the school until hostilities should cease. The school property belonged to the Carters—was their home, and they would stay, but they wished to learn what her desires were for the immediate future.

Heart-sick at the thought of returning to the Sandy Valley where she would be reminded daily of her own bitter cross, and feeling there was still much to add to her store of knowledge, Luda asked if she might remain as a private pupil until such time as it would be safe for her to venture North—a request which received hearty assent.

Thus with the coming of the opposing armies, the young ladies' seminary on Peach-Tree Creek closed, and in the devastated, blood-stained Southland, amid the smoke of cannon, and the falling of grapeshot and shell—dead seed sown upon the earth, a new life opened to Luda Grey.

CHAPTER XLI

THE CAPTURE

The Confederates, hard pressed by Sherman, had fallen back to the Chattahoochee River where strong intrenchments had long been under preparation. Scofield's forces crossed above, planting themselves in a good position.

Colonel de Mai's regiment was among the first to make this crossing. Though showing every consideration for his men, he was personally ever ready to rush into action. This daring, coupled with the fact that he did not send, but led, his men, made him the pride of the regiment.

It was Sherman's intention to take Atlanta, toward which he advanced with caution, well knowing the indomitable spirit of the southerners. Besides, he was paying dearly for every advance. After many struggles, he effected a successful crossing of the Chattahoochee, slowly progressing toward the city.

Forced to abandon their long-worked-for intrenchments on Peach-Tree Creek along the line of march, the brave southern soldiers attacked Thomas's corps but were beaten back so furiously that the men of the opposing armies fought sometimes hand to hand. The different companies became so mixed it was difficult at times to distinguish their corps, thus necessitating a roll-call in order to place the worn and weakened men in their own companies. Colonel de Mai, with a part of his regiment, had been sent over fields of growing corn and cotton to learn if possible the strength of Confederate forces encamped at certain points remote

from the main army. Misinterpreting the situation, the men became separated, and while returning were fallen upon by the enemy from ambush, many being wounded or killed before General Thomas could turn his batteries against the attacking column. After two hours terrific fighting, the Confederates were repulsed, but Colonel de Mai was among the missing.

Scores of both armies, dying and dead, covered the earth; many of the wounded, falling into the creek, were helplessly drowned. Hooker, who with Thomas was in command, lost heavily. But none was more sincerely mourned by comrades than the brave Colonel de Mai.

CHAPTER XLII

LUDA ON THE BATTLEFIELD

The alarm throughout the country was frightful, women and children fleeing to the hills for safety.

Finding the seminary grounds occupied by a great array of tents one morning, the Carters realized that preparations were on foot for a bitter engagement. The principal, relying on the assistance of her aunt—a woman of unusual ability and capable of great physical endurance—and of Luda Grey, had volunteered to care for as many as possible of the wounded soldiers; so it was that Carter Seminary was converted into a temporary hospital, the dormitories making admirable wards; and men in blue or gray, all, received the same kindly attention.

For Luda's protection a sort of habit with a hood was fashioned, adding much to the serious dignity of her appearance. Battles raged all about; and even before the outfit was completed, the girl had begun her work of mercy. Among those needing their first ministrations was a handsome young officer, who, as Luda spoke soothingly to him, exclaimed in a sort of delirium as she supposed:

"You here! Is it possible! Well, I've been cursing both my luck and Yankees, but your presence is such an unalloyed joy that I shall bury my anger under a pyramid of gratitude to the gracious fate that brought me here." Gazing at her in frank admiration, he continued, "Do you know, Lady Beautiful, your face has haunted me ever since that evening of all evenings when my heart went out to you and which, I confess, has not yet returned. Oh,

how like a Grecian goddess you were as you recited that lovely poem! Tell me, how did that second stanza start?"

She recognized in the complimentary officer the young man from whom she had received such marked attentions both at the school entertainments and in Atlanta. Believing his fevered mind to be wandering, she quietly departed as the doctor approached.

Donning her new black garments and taking a small outfit for first aid to the injured Luda accompanied Miss Carter on a tour of inspection to such parts of the battlefield as they could reach before nightfall. The skirmishing had occurred over widely-scattered areas, and the armies, tired and depleted, had moved across the creek at different locations and were spreading their tents for needed rest. In the dusk of nightfall, the women slowly made their way among the dead and wounded, receiving farewell messages from the dying, or reverently covering the face of many a patriotic son whose last battle had been fought.

CHAPTER XLIII

MARSE DE MAI'S RUFUS

While Miss Carter returned to the house in search of her colored boy to carry a severely-wounded man, Luda, deeply touched by the moaning and groaning of the helpless and dying soldiers, stood a moment uncertain what to do. Presently she perceived a negro lad who evidently dared not leave his post, beckoning to her. As she approached to learn his want, he half-whispered, looking furtively about, "Miss Luda—izzen you Miss Luda Grey? Yes, you is—I's sho' you is." And his eyes bulged like one not quite sure whether he speaks to the dead or the living.

"Are you a waiter from the school?" she asked, surprised at being thus familiarly addressed.

"Me? I's jis' Rufus, Miss Luda. You membah me—Marse de Mai's Rufus? But you's dead, izzen you? You was drowned in de Sandy. De niggahs all waded in de watah huntin' foh you. But dey didn' fin' you, did dey? Is you trav'lin' wid de Yankees? Marse Guy, he's tooken pris'ner, an' done bin tied down in de brilin' sun mos' all de day. I know'd him in a minute, an' I's bin walkin' roun' alookin' at him kase I wisht he could take me back to de Sandy. I wants ter go mighty bad, missy, but I b'longs to a suth'n off'sah now. I cain't do nuthin' fur Marse Guy, kase dey'd kill me shoh; but you's a sistah, an' kin go ovah de battlefiel'. Soon ez it gits darkah I'll show you whah he is, Miss Luda—ef'n you'll jis' try to git Marse Guy 'way frum de Rebs. I hates de Rebs, so I does."

Rufus' remark about looking for her in the Sandy coupled as it was with the astounding information regarding Guy, made no impression upon her mind. She was engrossed in the one statement only—"Marse Guy a pris'ner."

"The boy! he's under a delusion—for poor Guy is dead!" Then turning to Rufus, "Why do you think the prisoner is your young master? Could you not be mistaken?"

"Nope—it's Marse Guy, Miss Luda; I shoh know it. He's a kun'l now—I see de straps on his shouldahs."

"Alive! Guy alive! Oh, can it be!" she whispered to herself.

In spite of the statement that he was a prisoner, the boy's words thrilled her heart—the first thrill of joy since she saw his name among the killed—they meant that he lived. A tense moment of silence came over her, a sweet silence as the eternal voice of love spoke to her soul. And she wondered if it could be that by some strange prank of fortune he had been sent south, sent where he must die almost at her feet, and yet a stranger to her nearness!

Deep groans caught her ear; they came from a wounded Confederate who, burning with fever, was making an effort to reach the creek. She supplied him with cooling water from the canteen Rufus had, and he became more quiet, looking at her gratefully as she said, "I would like someone to carry this dear suffering man to the hospital."

"I reckon James could tote him, Miss Luda."

"James?"

"Yaas'm, Big Black Jim dat runned away frum de Whitney plantation. He jined de rigimint o' niggahs dat's bin chasin' de Johnnies so hahd. He's jis' crossin' de crik in de boat, slippin' back heah to

talk to me kase my master's gone to de off'sah's quarters plannin' de way to kill de Yanks."

Black Jim, at Luda's suggestion, bore the injured Confederate in his lusty arms to the hospital. A white flag floating over the grounds assured Jim's safety. On the way Luda told him of the information Rufus had given her regarding Colonel de Mai.

"You don't say so, Miss Luda! I's fotch a skiff ovah on dis side de crik, an' I'll go an' git Marse Guy ef'n you jis' tell me whah to fin' him. Dis niggah'll shoh go ef'n he gits killed on de spot."

"You're a Union soldier and couldn't pass the guards. But Rufus, being body-servant to a Southern officer, can safely go with me. Take your boat down by the willows and if we are successful, you can row the colonel back to his camp."

She spoke with a full understanding of the peril confronting them; for the Confederates, separated from the Union forces by the creek alone, had not only been holding their own but were making secret efforts to offset their losses by a greater harvest of prisoners.

"Dis niggah'll be dah wid de boat, Miss Luda. Jis' count on me totin' him crost," said the stalwart darkey as he disappeared among the weeping-willows,—a fit name for trees bordering a battlefield.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE RESCUE

"We kin go now, Miss Luda," said Rufus, "but we mus' be moughty keerful. Ef'n we's stopped, jis' let on I's showin' whah de wounded is. No soljer gwine ter hurt a sistah. When you come to Marse Guy, you kin jis' cut de ropes quick. But I spec' he's moughty nigh dead. His po' face done bin bakin' in de sun a long time. Soon's I gits clost to de place, I's gwine ter slide 'long an' when I passes him I'll hold my fingah out dis-a-way, an' den I'll hide."

Luda was not deaf to the groans of the many prostrate soldiers of both armies, but her heart was set on one mission only. Onward she groped, hoping, fearing, until Rufus, gently touching her arm, whispered, "Dah, Miss Luda, dah he is! Sh! de gyards is asleepin'." And the boy was quickly lost in the shadows.

Luda Grey knew without a single glimpse of his face that it was Guy, and in the realm of love and danger, she sank to her knees by his side. Her heart palpitated, her hands were seized with numbness, her lips so dry they refused to move, but in the inmost recesses of her being there was an imperturbable calm—a calm God gives to one's soul in moments of greatest danger or supremest joy. Woman though she was, undismayed she could have faced the guns of both armies at this instant.

She drew her hood far over her face so that only her eyes were free, but this was unnecessary.

An inexplainable sense of some friendly presence possessed him, and with heroic effort he raised his

head, looked at her a moment, murmured faintly, "Luda!" and dropped back.

Leaning over him, gently smoothing his fevered brow, she quietly reassured him. "Yes, it is Luda. But do not speak."

Wider and wider he opened his eyes. "Not my real Luda, but my angel Luda?" he whispered. Then after a moment's hesitation, as if communing with himself, "My brain reels. I am mad—mad! Tell me—oh, speak again. Once more let me think I hear the voice of my lost one. Tell me, angel spirit, that I shall be with her in the new life. I know I am dying, yes, dying—but if death means Luda—then I have conquered. My last battle is a victory."

"Hush!" she whispered, smoothing his brow again. "I am here to save you—here in reality."

Faint from effort, he had lost consciousness. Opening his collar and leaning her head upon his bosom, she listened in hope and fear for his heart-beats. "He still lives—yes, lives, thank heaven!"

Luda feared the guards—everything, even the swaying boughs with their shadows enfolding them. But she was filled with a glory of determination. She would give him liberty, save his life if possible, though it should cost her own freedom, even her life.

Chafing his hands vigorously, she forced herself to speak calmly. "I am Luda of the Big Sandy, come to take you away. We must be very still though, for the guards might hear, as they are very near."

"O Father, teach me to pray—and let me revel in this delusion," he said, slowly opening his eyes and gazing uncertainly. "It is Luda; I believe it is! But where are we? I'll willingly go to her paradise, but I haven't finished my work. I must first go with Sherman."

At last, as she more completely aroused him, he spoke with comprehension. "I thank heaven for this day of terrible battles and the very spilling of my own blood, through which fate has brought me my greatest treasure."

Clasping her hands around his head she elevated it, and pressed her cheek to his pulsating forehead. "As I cut the cords that bind you, do not move, lest we be discovered."

Afraid to even breathe, she crouched, trembling, at his side, until the watches who had raised up and looked toward them, were still again; then, with the knife she carried for cutting bandages, the torturing thongs that bound the man she loved, were snapped. Almost forcing him to swallow some of it, she pressed a flask of brandy to his lips. After which, with great effort, he struggled to his feet.

Luda urged that he entrust his comrades' release to her, and go.

"No, no. My boys shared the danger. They are entitled to freedom. Until we have cut the last rope, I will not go. Together we stand, together fall, together go free."

Even in her inability to swerve him from his purpose, she could not but admire him for his thoughtfulness and courage. Hardly knowing what had happened, and not seriously wounded, the other prisoners rose and silently made their way unaided toward the Federal line.

Unable to follow his comrades as they rapidly passed from sight among the willows, Guy, assisted by Luda, went quietly to the spot where it was hoped James would wait. "There is his boat. Go quickly," she said. Guy turned to speak. "Go, *go!*" she repeated, looking back in fright and anxiety. "Go—before we are discovered."

"Go? No. My place is with you. I will not leave you in peril."

"My peril is in your presence," she replied. "If not for your own safety, then for mine, go—please do. The boy Rufus will accompany me to my teacher."

"Rufus—and your teacher?" he said questioningly.

"Yes—in the hospital—there on the hill. We are nursing the wounded."

"Nursing the wounded? Then I shall see you again?"

"Yes. But I implore you, go quickly. They will get you again."

Reluctantly releasing her hand he stepped into the boat; and James, without speaking, pulled from the shore; while Luda sped like the wind back to find Rufus. The water was swift and deep, and James rowed rapidly, buoyed with the thought of making a safe landing and getting the colonel to his own army.

CHAPTER XLV

A GHOST ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Confident that their captives could move neither hand nor foot, the exhausted guards slept. Strangely enough, one of them was Mason, the illicit distiller. He had the usual hatred of certain of the ignorant for those above them in the social scale, utterly unconscious meanwhile that victory for the side on which he fought could but strengthen class barriers; and it had been with a sense of brutal satisfaction that he guarded Guy de Mai. Presently something aroused Mason from his stupor, a sort of foreboding possessed him, and he ran to inspect his prisoners. They were gone! All gone! To seek them would be but taking his life in his hands for he knew full well that Guy de Mai came of stock that would fight to a finish. Appreciating also the penalty for negligence of duty, he said to himself, "There hain't nothin' left fer me to do but to skedaddle if I want to save my bacon."

Without hesitating another moment, he made his way toward the creek, when the report of a rifle suggested the advisability of concealment. He was sure the Yankees were coming after him.

While Luda, on hearing the same shot, was just as sure that the Confederates would recapture Guy.

In fact, the shot had been fired at James' boat by a picket who heard the splashing of oars; and it had struck Guy de Mai. With a smothered exclamation, he fell forward, while the negro, redoubling his energy, pulled ahead, still skirting the shore, not daring to attempt crossing while Colonel de Mai, perhaps mortally wounded, lay flat in the boat,

and as soon as possible, he drove it well on the bank. Gently helping Guy to rise, he led him to a fence where they waited in the shadow until all was quiet again. Not knowing what else to do, James then took him to the hospital where, under Luda's direction he had earlier carried the wounded Confederate.

In mortal terror, Rufus had gone to his post, leaving Luda to find her way alone. When the report of the shot reached her ears, she paused a moment to listen, then ran back a few paces, sure that Guy had been re-captured, or worse—perhaps killed.

The moon emerging suddenly from behind a cloud threw its white light full upon her, as Mason, shielded by a big stump, looked directly in her face.

Her black garments blending with the shadows of the night, her face alone visible, she clearly suggested to the awe-struck man a visitant from another world.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated, "the ghost of John Grey's drownded gal!" And the mountaineer took to his heels in uncontrollable fright; plunging into the deepest water, he scrambled to the shore.

Unmolested, Luda pursued her way back, reaching the hospital just after James had arrived with Guy whose wound demanded instant attention. Although it was a relief that he had not been killed by the shot, she was greatly alarmed, for she had hoped he would reach his own camp. But here he was in the midst of the enemy.

The one thing uppermost in her mind now was to see that no one should suspect that the wounded soldier in blue was one of the prisoners who had escaped the guards.

CHAPTER XLVI

CHAPLAIN JACK

On the following morning the visiting surgeon was accompanied by a chaplain, a young man of unusual dignity—tall, handsome, serious. He asked for Miss Carter, and while he was sympathetically scanning the faces of the injured soldiers, Luda regarded him intently.

"How fortunate for these men that they are indoors, and under such splendid care," he remarked to the nurse who gave him a most penetrating look.

Dropping his head a moment, he asked himself, "Who is she like?" Then casually looked at her again. "Why, Luda—she reminds me of Luda."

A twinkle in her eyes as she recognized him left no room for doubt, and, with a boyish bound, he folded her in his arms.

"Jack! Brother Jack!"

"Why, sister Luda! Thank heaven!" Holding her closely, he repeated in heartfelt reverence, "Father, I thank Thee that once more I am permitted to look upon my sister's face." Then to her, "Luda, *sister,* if this is true, what happened you?"

"I will tell you all, Jack, when we have first done our best for these suffering men."

"I heard one of the Howard boys was here, disabled, and I came for the sole purpose of seeing him. To find you dear, was beyond my wildest imagination."

"He may be here, though I have not yet seen him, Jack dear. But Guy de Mai is here, dangerously wounded." She tried to avoid showing undue interest as she spoke of the man she had stolen from

the Confederate guards—saved perhaps from lingering death.

"Guy de Mai! Take me to him. He is colonel of one of our finest regiments—Ohio boys, brave and true."

Luda proudly led her distinguished-looking brother through the dormitories where, upon beds and improvised pallets, lay many stricken men for whom the chaplain made silent appeals as he passed along.

"You have not lost your power for good in the sick-room, I hope, Luda dear? You must be able to impart much strength to these men and boys who are sacrificing their lives in a cause they believe to be just. To me, your power has ever seemed marvelous. Since my work as chaplain I have thought of it as one of God's best gifts. The surgeon told me there was a nurse here whom the boys call 'the occult girl'—as the French soldiers called Joan of Arc 'the occult maid,' you know. But how could I have hoped her to be my lost sister."

Together they entered Guy's room. After a most cordial greeting between them, Luda withdrew. While making her rounds, she found to her surprise the young Confederate officer repeating fragments of her school poem, "The World Unseen."

"Can it be possible he quotes me!" she wondered. "I wrote that verse—could I have borrowed another's lines?"

"How many times I've asked myself what the deuce comes next," he said petulantly; "and now I'm going to get it right as sure as—" He turned his head and saw Luda entering. "Ah, pretty Miss Grey, I have a habit of amusing myself by talking aloud, reciting snatches, et cetera. Pardon me, but I am as much surprised to see you here, as you must also be to see me—if you remember me at all!

I am J. Harrington Louns. We first met in Atlanta, you know."

"I do remember you now, Mr. Louns—Captain Louns, I suppose I should say. I ought to have recognized you at once."

"Well, I could never forget you, Miss Grey—nor your glorious hair, which you seem to be hiding with that black poke; but in spite of that, and your nun-like gown, you look lovely." Immediately, and from that hour on, he paid her compliments which she as persistently ignored.

"The doctor would disapprove of your talking, captain—the fever might return, and that would be very bad for you."

"But I am so surprised at your presence here. You are too young and too beautiful," he continued, "to immure yourself in a place of this sort, hearing only groanings and complainings. Your school is broken up, no doubt. Ah, these Yankees are a bad lot."

"You were very ill when they brought you," she said, without seeming to notice his remarks; and again admonishing quiet, turned to go.

"Come again, I beg you, dear Miss Grey. Your intellectual grace and indescribable beauty have haunted me since the hour Madame Olivares introduced me to you; and I shall hope to see you often. To talk a little helps one to forget pain. And, being wounded, is more a plesaure than a hardship when one has so bewitching a nurse."

In the corridor Luda met her brother, who told her that Guy was resting, and that he had found Ned and Charles Howard, both wounded, the latter badly; amputation of an arm, however, might offer a bare chance for his life.

"I am almost afraid to ask you about home—mother—and all." Her lips quivered.

"Mother, according to my last letter, is well. But father and grandma have gone."

"I felt that father had passed on, for I saw him so vividly in a dream wherein his mother, in form of an angel, bore him away. Dear father!" Luda became faint, and her brother led her to a couch, where she soon revived. He then tried to persuade her to go to take a rest; but, as she wanted to be with him every moment possible, she declined. "I am not tired, Jack; but the news, even though expected, unnerved me. How proud mother must be of your work and of you, brother dear!" she said, smiling through her tears.

"So you still possess that wonderful gift of dream-vision? Mother told me father not only recognized and spoke to his mother a little while before the last, but to you also. Of course, she thought it delirium."

Through the half-open door Guy de Mai had observed the brother and sister, and once more there came to his mind's eye the picture of a barefoot girl under a cherry tree, with her little pink sunbonnet thrown from her face. How much had happened since that day of days away back on the Sandy!

Luda very soon returned to Guy's bedside, and though her eyes were red she had thoroughly recovered. Putting out his hand, Guy affectionately clasped hers. "Luda, your face was like whitest marble as Jack saved you from falling a moment ago. How I wanted to go to you myself!"

"I was not ill. It was only the news from home. But seeing you and Jack here makes me very happy."

"I wish you *would* go home, Luda, dear. Won't you promise me you will not remain after your brother and I have gone on? I so want you to go

away from the presence of danger. How did you come here? Won't you tell me? There are many things I long to say to you. But this, you tell me, is not the time nor the place. I suffered, God alone knows how much, over your mysterious loss."

"I, too, have had a share of the suffering. But your first duty is to yourself—to get well."

"Yes, yes—that I may return to a more urgent duty."

"Duty! Duty for a man to raise his hand against his brother! I do not understand it so. How, in this Christian age, an educated man can shoot to kill is more than my mind has power to grasp. I may be unpatriotic, but to me this frightful carnage is appalling. Perhaps I forget the cause and appreciate only the horror. But I see no justice in war, and I am proud Jack did not enlist to kill."

"My country calls me; and if I should not obey I should be a coward. In your inmost soul, Luda, dear, I'm sure you do not approve of slavery. Our great country, as a land of freedom, must overthrow this curse."

"Then if men *will* fight, women must endure," she said sadly. "Yet, if I could persuade you never again to take up arms—that, in my opinion, would be the most noble, most honorable course."

"Ah, dear Luda, such an act would remain a stigma upon one's name forever."

"Is not the brand of Cain a blacker stigma?" she asked.

Leaving him with a promise to come again soon, she sought her brother. She found him and Miss Carter talking with Ned Howard, who had been treated for a slight wound. While Luda chatted with Ned, Jack took the opportunity of learning from Miss Carter something of his sister's school life; and then, as the surgeons were about to per-

form serious operations, he begged that she and Luda should not remain. As they retired to their rooms Luda, unable to banish the impression made upon her on hearing the young Southern officer repeat her lines, asked the teacher if she remembered her verses at commencement.

"Perfectly."

"Were they not understood to be original?"

"Certainly—otherwise you would not have been awarded the prize. But what has brought this to your mind?"

"A Mr. Louns, who visited the school that evening is here wounded, you know, and was repeating them a while ago. It seemed scarcely possible he could have remembered them; so I wondered if I could have plagiarized."

"How absurd, child! Some one would have discovered the appropriation?"

The boom of cannon attracted them. From one of the upper windows they saw the smoke, and with their field glasses could discern the movements of the armies. Bald Hill had just been taken by Leggett.

"Oh," sighed Luda despairingly, "this war grows more terrible each day! What will the end be?"

"Parents childless, wives widowed, and children orphaned, the country pauperized," answered her preceptress.

CHAPTER XLVII

JEALOUSY

When Hood's retreat opened the way for Sherman's army to enter Atlanta, Chaplain Grey had unexpectedly left with his regiment, confident that he would see Luda again. Beyond a curtailed relation of the anxious days following her disappearance, he had told her little of the happenings at home. He had, however, informed her that no message explaining her going had been found, and that all, far and near, believed her lost in the flood. Deep was her dismay when she learned this, realizing how terribly she had caused her loved ones to suffer.

In making her customary visits Luda could not find it in her heart to omit the Southern captain, despite the fact that he persisted in his pretty speeches and compliments, which perhaps were in a way scarcely unpleasant to her feminine ear. She found him one morning in subdued conversation with one Elswick, a disabled soldier who had been among the hospital's first patients, and who, though convalescent now, was considered by the surgeons as unfit for duty. The impression this man had made upon her was far from agreeable; in some way quite unexplainable, she could read in his face an expression of covert guilt.

To-day politely ignoring his presence, she took the chair just vacated by him and spoke to the captain of his own apparent improvement.

"Yes, Miss Grey, I am really better; yet I don't know but in a way I regret that fact. Improvement renders departure inevitable, and I feel as does every patriotic citizen, that I must do my part to save the

South. As I hope so soon to be going, may I not to-day confess my renewed interest in you—not as nurse, but as woman; and won't you let me hope for a more promising friendship between us? May I some day tell you I love you?"

"And you, too, want to be in battle—are anxious to be spilling blood, to slay an imaginary enemy? Oh, this fever of war!"

"On the contrary, I should dearly love to remain under your care as nurse, even in spite of knowledge you thrust upon me that my attentions as more than patient are distasteful to you. You have even forbidden my slightest compliments; but knowing so well perhaps your distinguishing beauty, you are not amenable to compliments."

"Surely not to flattery. And may I not persuade you to refrain from such references in the sick-room?" she answered.

"In all seriousness, yes, dear nurse. But," taking her hand, "I was fascinated with you the evening you so charmed all by your soul-stirring, entrancing lines. And as time goes by I find myself growing more and more fond of you. No matter how you protest, I am determined to tell you how absolutely impossible it is for a man of my temperament to resist your charms. Your very presence fetches with it the power of engulfing one who has any love of the beautiful in his soul."

"Oh, Captain Louns, don't—I beg of you—don't speak thus to me. I am here to serve, to do what I can for your comfort, and should be guilty of the grossest disobedience if I should allow you or any other to break our rule in this hospital. But I must go; I am due at the doctors' room."

Withdrawing her hand, she rose hastily. "Come, Patricia," she called to her colored assistant just outside the door.

"Pardon me if I have seemed abrupt or hasty. Won't you stay, or come soon again? We will forget what has been said to-day, if it please you more. I am sure I should hardly have lived without your inspiring visits, and I beg you to come as often as possible. And, Miss Grey, I want you to tell me something of him—the patient with whom you spend much time. Is he so sick that he needs your closest attention, or what is the attraction?"

"Explain yourself, Captain Louns!" she exclaimed indignantly. "But no; good-by. I will come later to hear what the doctor says. Much talking, I'm certain, is not good for you."

"To be candid with you, I must and will talk, dear nurse. It is my duty. I'm told there is a Federal officer here in this hospital, who really monopolizes your time. And is it true that you give your services without distinction? This is not a hospital for bluecoats—a place to save the lives of men who shoot down our brave Southern boys—I sincerely hope. Is Miss Carter interested in Yankees, men who are impoverishing and destroying the South? I am astounded at such a position being taken by Southern women, especially our most brilliant women. Besides, I must report the d— Yank."

"No, no, no. This building and our efforts are consecrated to charity," Luda replied soothingly. "We are here to be a help to the wounded and sick, and consider it quite right we should care for the helpless of both armies, recognizing only the good we may do. You men are doing enough unrighteous work; we women must balance the scale. As for myself, I formed no opinion as to the justice of this terrible war before I found myself in the midst of it. And now, from every point of view, its cause to me is meaningless. I may be unpatriotic—scarcely what you call a true American—

but I heartily deplore the spirit of dissension, the taking of life for *any* cause—and believe there is no cause that justifies it. My mother once read to me about a man who killed his brother; 'the brand of Cain was ever after upon him.' This brand, I believe, is upon any man who shoots to kill a human being. And since the night I first went over the battlefield, that phrase has impressed itself more fully upon my mind. When armies shoot to kill opposing armies, the wrong is not lessened, the individual responsibility not diminished. Arguments for or agaisnt the North matter little to me, captain, for I shall as heretofore care for the disabled, losing sight of how and why."

"'The brand of Cain,'" repeated the captain after she had gone. The words had acquired a new meaning to him.

As Luda passed into the wide hallway men were being brought in from a terrible conflict which was reported to have been the most fearful of all battles, with the Chattahoochee a river of blood. At Room 10 she again encountered Elswick, this time conversing in a whisper with Colonel de Mai, and she was at once conscious of an unusual restraint in Guy's manner. And the next time she called the restraint was perhaps more observable.

Meanwhile, both the officers were improving, and their leaving the hospital only a matter of a few days. Since her latest experience with Louns she had longed for an opportunity to have a serious talk with Guy; she feared he was in imminent danger now, as Louns had threatened to report. But he seemed so changed she doubted if she would have the courage, even if the opportunity should present itself. His demeanor being that of a man whose nerves would get the better of him, she attributed

the marked difference in his manner to anxiety about his own affairs.

Again she thought, "Perhaps he is waiting for the order prohibiting other than professional topics of conversation in the sick-room, to be rescinded." She had a sort of heart-fear of what he might say, and a peculiarly painful and reluctant caution suddenly came over her. She had supposed the war question to be the sole object of contention between the two men, Louns alone appearing to be hostile. If any suspected that the wounded Federal was one of the prisoners who had mysteriously escaped the night Colonel de Mai was brought to the hospital, Luda was not aware of it. And she regarded it as quite natural that it be inferred her acquaintance in each case began at the hospital.

Elswick said to himself one day, "I love that nurse, and would like to settle the whole affair if I dared tell her. These officers have great faith in the power of the buttons they wear, and I guess women do like men in gilt trimmings pretty well." One morning, however, he took courage and casually remarked to Louns, "Well, what do you think, captain! That Yankee is making up to Nurse Grey!" Adding sarcastically, "There's little good in his attentions, too. He's fooling—that's all. I surely wouldn't care to repeat the ungentlemanly remarks I've heard him make more times than one. But he's a mighty handsome fellow—looks the born commander; and most any girl might be flattered by his attentions, only that he's a Northerner. Miss Carter always prevents my finding out how the Yank came here; she is so good."

Though he made no reply, this insinuation vexed Louns to a point almost beyond endurance.

To de Mai Elswick remarked, "The captain here is making violent love to the nurse, and she spends

a lot of time in his room. I guess it's an engagement all right."

Guy was dismayed, yet acknowledged to himself that it was perfectly natural she should be engaged. Why not? She was free. But in his mind he determined to learn the truth, whatever it might be, and from the girl herself.

"Luda," he said kindly, the next time she came, "did you know Captain Louns previous to his coming to the hospital?"

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed. I met the captain in Atlanta. Then, too, he was here at our commencement. This building has been my home since I left the Sandy Valley. It was our school, you know, until broken up by the war. Oh, that terrible word! It seems to me it should belong only to uncivilized tribes. As you are resting now, I will go and attend a poor fellow who has just arrived, frightfully wounded. I'll return later to take care of your wants. How glad I am to find you so much better. Improvement is quite becoming to you."

Her innocent statement relative to Louns meant little to Luda; but to Guy much, almost too much. It was a harder blow than she ever knew, nor did she guess that his heightened color, which betokened improvement, was caused by the information Elswick had just imparted.

"I believe that Luda loved me once," Guy admitted to himself as she left the room, "but now it is too late. She is no doubt promised to another—perhaps this very captain, and I must be on my guard."

Her presence there had puzzled him. It evidently required means to pass three years or more in such a seminary, and what was the source of her income?

"Elswick tells me Louns is strikingly handsome, an officer, and greatly devoted to the girl. Who can

blame her? She is so beautiful that men of any station could but adore her. Anyway, I will tell her that I still love her—have been faithful to that love. Even though the knowledge be death to my every hope, I must know my fate. A final disappointment can no more than break a heart so tried and sore."

Following up his diabolical scheme, Elswick informed the captain that "the Yankee colonel was deuced familiar with Nurse Grey—and not choice in his words about her," which infuriated the hot-blooded Southerner, who at once swore vengeance.

Making calls later than usual, Luda encountered Elswick as he stooped to pick up an envelope of official appearance he had awkwardly dropped just as he was leaving the colonel's room. Guy appeared pale and nervous, though he declared he was so much better he would rejoin his command immediately if it were possible to pass the Confederate line. "Yet I expect to find that impossible, since the Confederates are encamped between my army and this sacred spot, where you have ministered to me. But I'm tired of confinement, Luda, and long to get into harness again—to be on the field of action. Your absolute indifference and unchanging coldness toward me proves that what I have been told is true without a doubt, and I confess destroys all hope of recovery under this roof. You love another—are engaged to him! Luda, oh, Luda! Would to God I had not known it, that I might have dreamed on! One can do so much if inspired by hope. God alone knows my heart—and what your answer today has meant to it!"

Though dumfounded at his declaration, she tried to dissuade him from going, urging that it would be unsafe until he was out of danger; besides, she feared he would find great difficulty in reaching his command.

But he was determined, and observed, "There are others more ill than I am who need your care. Besides, it is not care I need now, not nursing. My place is in line—action."

A movement of his arm exposed beneath his pillow an envelope—a facsimile of the one Elswick had carried away.

Heartsick at his hasty decision, and not understanding its meaning, she felt that she must not stay where he was, and was about departing when Guy begged her to remain one moment. "Just one moment, Luda, if not for my sake, then for the sake of days gone by, for the sake of the unspoken words in the garden the day I wanted to tell you of my love!"

Their eyes met and she dropped hers, so impressed was she by the evident suffering in his.

"The time has come, Luda, dearest girl, when I must speak for myself. You have evaded my inquiries; you have never told me why you left home —how you came here—nor allowed me to tell you anything of my trials after your disappearance. But now that I shall soon leave, you owe it to me to be frank—even to confide in me."

"Be careful," she whispered, "the attendant is just outside. I will return."

Thrilled with hope, she was back before he hardly expected her, but when he hesitated, stammered, his expression changing from tenderness to reproach, her heart stood still.

"Is it possible, Luda, that you are engaged to the rebel officer here—that you are to marry him? Is this the cause of your——."

"Oh, Colonel de Mai, why should you question me thus? It is unjust. Besides, as you are not in a condition to continue in this strain without injuring yourself, I'll leave you for the present."

"Oh, don't go, Luda, don't!" But she had passed the door.

Later the mystified girl would have given the world to retrace her steps, to listen to him, and to tell him all. But now she feared it was too late. Some unlooked-for opposition seemed always to prevent her ever having an understanding with Guy.

She was due at Captain Louns' room. On his table she noticed a letter, twin to the one she saw under Guy's pillow, and she knew in her breaking heart that something very unusual was taking place. But the captain, smiling pleasantly, spoke of his sudden improvement and of his intention to be discharged the next day.

"Each departure, Miss Grey, makes room for another who needs your care. I shall see you again unless—well, if I live."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BRAND OF CAIN

Luda's character was one of poetic loveliness. While generous impulses made her strangely susceptible to fancies, yet prudence governed her actions. Her gentle nature felt keenly Guy's unexpected questioning, which appeared to her as both cruel and unreasonable; and a peculiar sadness mingled with resentment filled her heart, shadowing her serious face.

"One can but distrust everything," she repeated wistfully. "Even the message, 'He belongs to your life and you belong to his.' Such phantasies are due no doubt to an overwrought brain. When born to shadows, happiness seems beyond one's reach." She had returned to Guy's room, but noticing he had fallen into a doze, she withdrew.

Grievously disturbed, she retired to her chamber, where, wrestling with troubled thoughts, she fell into a broken slumber. In her dreams the man she loved called her, and she awakened with a new heaviness weighing upon her heart. Donning her robe, she passed down the stairway, stepped lightly through the corridor, and went straight to Guy's door, where, lest it should wake him, she hesitated to tap.

Suddenly, as by a breath of air, the door half opened of itself. He was not there!

"Gone! Without one word! How could he do it!" she exclaimed pathetically. Bordering on distraction, she stood transfixed on the threshold. Finally stepping into the tomb-like chamber, more empty than she had previously believed four bare

walls could be, with a deep sigh she dropped to the bed; but for a moment only; then making an effort to steady her nerves, she staggered to her feet, and picked up an envelope from the floor. It was unsealed, bore no address.

She drew from it a letter; unfolded and read:

"Carter Hospital, near Peach Tree Creek, Ga.
"To Col. Guy de Mai, of the Federal Army:

"Sir—I have this day been made cognizant of cold-blooded, dastardly and slanderous remarks coming from you, of which no gentleman of the South would be guilty; nor would I be worthy of the appellation of gentleman did I not promptly resent same. Therefore I challenge you, sir. And the present being times of stress, the duelling code may be waived for the nonce to the extent of permitting the challenger to suggest the hour and place of meeting. Have the goodness to answer by bearer if six A. M. and the grove back of the campus be agreeable to you, and acquaint me with your choice of weapons; also with the name of your honorable second.

"I am, sir, yours, etc.,
"J. Harrington Louns,
"Captain, C. S. A."

"A duel! Guy!"

The paper fluttered in her nerveless fingers while her eyes flew to the great hall clock.

"Five minutes to six! God helping me, can I reach them before it is too late?"

Like a frightened deer she sped through the grove. Far in the rear, and standing apart, were two small groups of men, two of whom, recognizable by their uniforms—one of blue, the other of gray—advanced, met, shook hands and stepped back again.

Holding aloft a handkerchief, a third man, in slow, measured words, called "One-two-three"—

Luda understood the command, and before the handkerchief fell and the last word, "Fire!" could be uttered, she swept between them, whirled, tragically extending both hands. "The brand of Cain!" she exclaimed, and, exhausted, sank at their feet.

Two arms went down—two pistol shots penetrated the sod.

Colonel de Mai stooped to raise her, but a terrible fear smote him on finding her limp and apparently lifeless. "Oh, God," he said pathetically, "we have murdered her!"

With the sound of clinking sabers, a commanding voice ordered "Hands up!" and the man in blue was surrounded by a posse of Confederates under an orderly, who, in mocking derision said to him, "Ah, ha, we have you again, Yankee dog! No more escapes, my brave cavalier!"

"Seeing I am in your hands, gentlemen, like a soldier I shall follow your bidding; but, may I beg for a moment with the nurse?"

"Not one," was the reply. "Come along, or we'll do the shooting to-day."

Guarded by four, helpless, lips compressed and muscles tense, Guy listened while his arch-enemy proffered his service to the surgeons now looking after Luda; heard them refuse the aid volunteered, saying she was recovering, and that they would attend her to the hospital.

How he regretted his part! It had been more brave, he said to himself, not to have recognized the challenge, than to endanger this noblest of girls. After a moment's hesitation, with almost superhuman force, he tore himself away and rushed back to her. But he was fiercely seized and, his hands bound, ordered to face front and march.

Eyes glinting steel, the young colonel complied, but gave his captors a look that could have but one meaning: "I may be silenced, but conquered, never! My day will come."

"The brand of Cain!" flashing through his mind, Captain Louns went at once to camp. Although a deep consciousness of guilt possessed him, yet he so passionately detested the man who was robbing him of the one he had determined to win, that he set himself to plan some way to prevent a meeting between the girl and his rival. If villainy were necessary to accomplish this, he was ready to mask his part in it.

Rising at the first bugle call the next morning, he hurried to the tent of his superior officer to give his version of the meeting, intending thereby to make a hero of himself in the general's estimation. But as bad news travels fast, detailed reports of the affair had preceded him, and he was greatly surprised at the commandant's reception of him.

"Captain, had you not a deeper motive—did not jealously play a part in the matter?" he was asked.

"In all sincerity, general, I admit my personal interest in the nurse. Gratitude had deepened into affection, and I believed it my duty to protect her."

"What we would like to know is how a Union prisoner, who had eluded our guards, got into the hospital when it was supposed after his escape that he had reached the Federal army."

"Carter hospital being gratuitous, I'm told that mercy is shown to the wounded of both armies," Louns answered. "A convalescent named Elswick, whom I had requested to learn if possible Colonel de Mai's attitude toward the nurse, had informed me of his slanderous remarks, which reflected on both her and myself."

"Elswick! A man called Elswick, you say? He

it was who reported the intended duel to us."

"Is it possible that this informant is an Iago fooling me to the top of my bent?" ejaculated the captain.

"There is little choice between the author of a slander and one who voluntarily circulates it," said his superior in rank. "I should be interested to learn more of this young colonel. The name de Mai stands high in military annals; history records the gallantry of men of that name in the Revolution, the call to arms of 1812, and the Mexican War. Even though he is fighting against the South, against me and my principles, I honor the former heroism of his kin. But as you are aware, prisoners receive little consideration at this stage of the war."

The general abruptly terminating the interview, Louns withdrew.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE CAPTAIN ASKS FOR LUDA'S HAND

The doctor's one prescription for Nurse Grey was absolute quiet; but, keenly alive to the welfare of Guy, she found little rest. Grave fears relative to his comfort possessed her; and only that she hoped to learn where they had taken him, she would have declined to see Captain Louns when he called the following morning. Reluctantly, however, she went down to the music-room, now the general office of the hospital, in which he waited.

Heaven had not denied to the captain a wonderful amount of self-esteem, as well as a strikingly handsome, if perhaps a rather weak face, which was now adorned with a well-trained military mustache—a face that did not to-day betray any sinister motive. Presenting a fine exterior in his officer's suit of gray, he was to-day cool and calculating to a fault. Luda merely bowed as he rose to greet her, failing to observe his proffered hand, and had her reception been more gracious, her appearance in simple white instead of the severe black robe would no doubt have caused him to expatiate in his usual fashion on her beauty.

"I have come to plead forgiveness, Miss Grey," he said in a complacent manner. "And if, in your estimation, I have committed an error, it was not, I assure you, of the heart."

"I am quite prepared to grant, captain, that you have committed an error—a very grave error. Whether that error be of the head or the heart, we will not at present discuss."

"You know, Miss Grey, that Elswick is a friend

of the South—a friend of yours and mine; and beyond doubt, as he represented, de Mai was insincere with you, else he would not have dared to speak to him in a critical or disparaging manner of you. As for myself, I'm proud to admit that it was love for you, an unconquerable passion, that impelled me to consider a challenge with the Yankee—a man who, in my opinion, deserved to be shot down in cold blood rather than to be given an even chance to kill me. Accepting Elswick's reports as one-hundredth part rue, de Mai is a vile sort, not worthy of your slightest regard, much less your efforts to nurse him back to health, enabling him to shoot or command others to shoot down our brave boys. How I should like to be able to persuade you to relinquish this man, to reject his protestations! I truly believe his one aim here in this building was to acquire knowledge of the inside workings of our forces for the benefit of the Northern armies; that his illness or being wounded was a mere pretense; and I beg you not to allow yourself to be contaminated by his beastly friendship. Why, dear nurse, that man would be a traitor to his Creator if it served his purpose; nothing would be beneath him if he could gain his point. Only a man of honor and the greatest integrity would be worthy of you, and if you will not think me egotistical in offering for your consideration not only my protection, but myself, my name, I should be most happy to do so. You have thwarted my every attempt to tell you in the past of my affection, and perhaps it seems inapropos to speak of love even now, while Sherman and his army of starved wolves are devastating our dear Southland; but my wish to protect you gives me the courage to do so. The Yanks have stolen our slaves, destroyed our homes, killed our heroes, yet, not content, they seek to carry away our lovely

women. And Northern men, we must admit, do not know the first principles of the honor due a wife."

"Oh, you must certainly pardon me, captain; neither your kindly offer, nor your condemnation of Colonel de Mai is in order. Besides, I am positively amazed at your presumption in calling here, since your insult to me, to my teachers, in the unwelcome notoriety you have brought upon us and the hospital by your challenge to Colonel de Mai. You have not only mortified me past your power to atone, but you have made me ashamed of myself, since my name must ever be coupled with the horrible affair."

"During my stay here, Miss Grey, you refused to listen to my protestations or to receive my attentions, always referring to the hospital rules; but I am not subject to hospital rules now, and will not be evaded longer. Until you assure me that you will accept me—will some day be my wife—I acknowledge that I am most wretched, unfit for duty. My place to-day is in the field, either on the march or in battle; but in my present state of mind I am unfit for either. Your promise will make a new man of me."

"Kindly defer the discussion of such affairs for the present, captain, as I have neither time nor inclination to listen to-day."

"I realize perfectly that you are ill at ease to-day, and that you will discuss them another time gives me hope. But bear with me; I only wish to help——"

"Help? Where did they take Colonel de Mai? "Perhaps he——"

"He is in prison."

"Oh!"—her face blanching as colorless as the dress she wore. "Then he is past your help!"

"Quite the contrary—if you accept my offer. Together we can do much. Besides," smiling sardonic-

ally, "for the sake of my love for you, and in consideration of your high regard for the Yankee, I might make a sort of hero of myself, sacrifice my feelings for the moment, and intercede for his release. But, forgive me, dear Miss Grey. Sarcasm aside, I believe that past acquaintanceship actuates you in his behalf, and——"

"Captain Louns!" called a messenger boy at the threshold.

"A dispatch for me!" he exclaimed, tearing the envelope. "Ah, it is from my sister, Ruth. She has read the newspaper reports of the interrupted duel." Reading aloud, "'Are you J. Harrington Louns, of Atlanta? Was your opponent Guy de Mai, of the Sandy Valley? Answer. Ruth Louns, Lexington, Ky.'"

"Ruth Louns!" ejaculated Luda. "She was governess to the sisters of Colonel de Mai."

"You astound me, Miss Grey. Sister Ruth and I have seen but little of each other in recent years, and I never dreamed de Mai was of the family with which she stayed so long. Is it possible that you also are from the Sandy Valley, and knew him before he entered the hospital?"

"I am from the Sandy Valley, and knowing the colonel as I do, I deny that it is or ever was possible for him to tarnish the good name of woman. And if any effort of mine could help him to-day, that effort would surely be made. As the brother of Ruth, you might use your influence to free him, even as by your action he is a prisoner."

"If you appeal, I obey. I think it quite within my power to procure his exchange for one of our officers now held in Northern prisons. This, however, is a serious time—battles raging incessantly and commanders busily engaged planning their modes of attack. Being a well-known character by

reason of his daring, both at the battle of Gettysburg and in the Lynchburg raid, de Mai would have been recaptured sooner or later. Yet the intended duel was responsible for his present incarceration, and now that I realize it is personal friendship that inspires you in his behalf, for your sake I will see what can be done. Myself, I hate, abominate, Yankees. They are an uneducated, undisciplined lot of foragers, traducers of homes, and unworthy the notice of lovely Southern girls. And do you know, Miss Grey, I am receiving congratulations from all parts of the Confederacy for de Mai's capture, for he was religiously sought, and all believe the duel was merely a well-planned ruse of mine to get him back in our hands. So the credit of his capture is to J. Harrington, your humble servant."

"Suppose Colonel de Mai be prevailed upon to promise not to take up arms again, would he be allowed to go home?" Luda asked, a ray of hope stealing into her heart like sunshine through rifts in the clouds; but as transitory as the sunshine, for she had little expectation that such promise could be obtained, knowing full well his determination not to leave before the war was over.

"If you cared to avail yourself, I might ask for a pass, and you could go to see him," the captain volunteered with a cynical smile. "But the reign of discipline is rigid. If granted at all it would be through my influence alone."

In spite of his offers of intercession, Luda distrusted the man, and stepped back with an acute sense of bitterness, as, with a baffled feeling, the captain left the room, disconcerted by her coldness, yet with a dogged determination to win her love.

CHAPTER L

THE BEARER OF BAD TIDINGS

Later in the day, as Luda's mind was in a fever of anxiety, Elswick, who also had left the hospital, was announced. She refused at first to see him, but when he insisted to the servant that his message was important, she consented.

"How-dy, Miss Grey," said the man, standing with hat in hand as she entered. "I come to tell you about Colonel de Mai. The white flag of the hospital and you can't protect him now, so I reckon he won't get off as easy as before. An order from headquarters says he is to be shot."

Luda's eyes flashed with fear and indignation; but her apprehensions were so great that she compelled herself to listen. Could it be known that she had released Guy from the battlefield? Was it possible? Was it possible that was what he meant, she wondered.

"That de Mai is considered a dangerous enemy to Secession—one of the boldest, most fearless wearing blue uniform. But he has gone too far, and at sundown day after to-morrow he, with other dangerous Yankees, will be shot down in cold blood."

Luda's tongue seemed paralyzed. For a moment she could not speak.

"Accidentally I overheard the talk between two orderlies," explained Elswick. "One of them rebels at being among the ten picked to do the job. Five guns are loaded, you know, and five have blank cartridges, so nobody knows who does the killin'."

"In heaven's name, what do you mean?" she

gasped, sinking to the nearest chair. "What has Colonel de Mai done to merit such a terrible thing? What is the charge against him?"

"Challenged one of our officers, and he's got to suffer the penalty." The man's countenance did not change as he made this mendacious statement.

"He challenged the captain through jealousy; he was afraid of losing you. But he always treated me square, so I don't like to see him shot, if it can be avoided."

"Why do you say that Colonel de Mai was the challenger? I believe you know he was not."

"I do know all about it. He certainly was."

"Then you have no conscientious scruples, Elswick. I'm surprised at you."

"I thought it my duty to tell you," he went on, not seeming to notice her criticism. "You was good to me when I was so sick. You was a sister to me, nurse—and I won't forget it, either."

"Does Captain Louns know of the order, and does he endorse the charge?" Luda asked, little imagining that to the captain she owed this very call from Elswick, through whom he hoped to find out the state of her mind after his proposal.

"I don't know. But Captain Louns is about the only person who could do anything to help the colonel now; and I reckon he'd do it if you asked him to. If I was you and didn't want the Yankee finished up, I'd get the captain to workin' for him."

"Since you tell me all you have, I will bid you good afternoon, sir, not wishing to discuss the matter further."

"But you understand, nurse, what I've told you is between us. I might get into trouble for repeating secrets of war; but I'd do anything for you, and that's why I'm here to tell you what I heard."

CHAPTER LI

THE GENERAL

Luda was frantic. "Guy to be shot!"

What could she do, when she was herself a stranger in a country where every man, woman and child was hostile to a Northerner or Union sympathizer?

Unable to resume her work, she begged to remain in her room, where, on her knees, she implored Heaven to save the man she loved. But not until dawn broke over the eastern horizon did she think of rest. She fell across the bed without removing a garment worn the day before, and in the short sleep of nervous exhaustion that came to her, Amarita brought a message. Such was its import that she awoke with a stony calm that can only follow intense suffering. Nervousness, fear, anxiety had vanished, and she set about formulating a plan to find and see Guy. How it could be done, she knew not. She would scarcely be allowed to cross the line of either army just after such desperate battles; so only by some ruse and quick action could she hope to save him. Unversed in the rules of war, she had not for a moment questioned the entire truth of Elswick's statement regarding the fate to be meted out to the young colonel. But in her soul Amarita's message meant victory, and victory for her meant victory for Guy.

The ceaseless roar of cannon oppressed her during the early day, and when the powder smoke lifted she had watched with her field glasses the going into camp of detachments of the two armies.

Draped in her long black cloak, with its

closely drawn hood, and carrying her nurse's outfit, late that afternoon she set out with the resolve to seek the brigadier-general in command of the army, to whom she would personally appeal for the release of Colonel de Mai.

The very heavens seemed to move encouragingly, the air to whisper hope, as through the campus, down to the creek she went. But her heart was torn afresh on passing near the fields of recent carnage, where numerous soldiers were bearing away the wounded, while others were digging trenches into which the dead were promiscuously laid in heaps.

"Miss Luda," some one called.

Turning, she saw Rufus running toward her.

"I jis' comin' to tell you sumpin'."

"What is it, Rufus?"

"Dat Cap'n Louns ain't no friend to Marse Guy. I's list'nin' when he talk to de boss 'bout him; an' I'd sen' dis razor to his heart in a minit ef'n nobody's lookin'."

"Oh, no, Rufus, you must not do that. It is wicked to even think such a thing. But, Rufus, do you know that Colonel de Mai is a prisoner, and they are going to shoot him?"

"To shoot Marse Guy! What fur?" and Rufus turned clay-color.

"If you could guide me through the encampment to the general's headquarters, we might save him again."

"Mebbe I could, Miss Luda. But de boss gwine to kill me ef'n he know 'bout hit."

"Have no fear, Rufus; besides, no one will think it wrong for you to attend a nurse on her way to a sick general."

"When you gwine, Miss Luda?"

"Now—at once."

At each "Halt!" Luda modestly exhibited her hospital badge, replying, "I'm a nurse, going to the brigadier-general."

Spies were active in both factions, rendering it impossible for persons unvouched for to enter camp; yet the nurse and her valet in gray were not detained.

She found the general in consultation with several other officers. On learning, however, that a woman wished to see him, he spoke quietly to a member of his bodyguard and they departed, as, lifting his hat both gallantly and graciously, he rose to greet her.

"I am on a mission of mercy, general, and beg to speak with you at your leisure."

"What is it, miss? What can I do for you?"

His kindly reception banished much of her fear. "You hold as prisoner a dear friend of mine, sir," she began. "He is very sick, having recently left the hospital. And in prison, I despair of his life."

"A prisoner—recently out of hospital?"

"He is of the Federal army, sir—Colonel de Mai."

"Oh, Colonel de Mai. Yes, yes—I have heard various rumors of the colonel's exploits, both in the Army of the Potomac and with Sherman. And the colonel is a friend of yours, eh?"

"Yes, sir—of many years."

"It is one of the sad phases of this war, miss, that we find among our opponents old friends, recent comrades at military schools, even relatives, and when they fall into our hands it is quite natural to wish to spare them. But duty compels me to say that it is quite beyond my desire to sacrifice justice to mercy at this time. Not only would it redound to my discredit to set at liberty such a foe to Secession, but it would be a dangerous precedent; de Mai, I understand, revels in bravado, fears nothing.

Feigning weakness, he tricked our guards, cut ropes and liberated a number of dangerous Union men, who, with himself, had been captured while reconnoitering. So your wish must be fruitless. Besides, I could but feel it an indignity you would bring upon the head of this army to even ask for the release of one of its most malignant foes. You thus insult the very foundation of Secession. And now," rising, "as I am in consultation with officers relative to to-morrow's engagements, I must be excused."

"Stay, oh, please stay, sir. This is the first real request I have ever made of man. Do not, I pray you, refuse to grant it, and may God help you to see the right."

"I am most sorry that a beautiful young woman should interest herself in seeking the freedom of anyone aiding in the destruction of our glorious South. This man challenged a Confederate officer, to which act he owes his present situation; else we would scarcely have got our hands upon him again. And as we now know where he is, we shall see that he does not go free. No, no. And repeating my regrets at being unable to please you, I bid you good night."

As he turned to go, Luda sank to her knees at his feet, weeping as only a woman on the verge of a breakdown can weep, her face the mask of despair. "Oh, general, dear general, I would to God that you could read the language of my heart; you would know a truth never before admitted. Know that it is a woman's heart that pleads to you. I love Guy de Mai, and in taking his life you rob me of every future hope—even kill me. In Heaven's name, may I not prove to you that he did not challenge Captain Louns? Will you hear me? Will

you have the goodness to read this?" She handed him an envelope.

Carefully perusing the sheet, the general knit his brow as if in deep thought; then stood a moment in silence, an unbounded charity veiling the expression of fatherly interest that covered his grave face. A strange something pierced his heart—the all-pervasive sentiment of the girl's love, or the conquering influence of her rapt soul. Her great, sad eyes met his, and in their depths he recognized her lofty purpose. She plead, and although determined to be firm, he was yielding. Some peculiar power was destroying his resolution; he was conscious of a strange tugging at his brain, and realized that his denial of her wish was being met by a great maels rom of opposing forces; that the very air was impregnated with an irresistible something that seemed to whisper in his ear, "Grant it, grant it!" But his duty, his responsibilities, must be respected.

"Tell me, my fair maid, you are not the lady for whom jealousy between these two men brought about the duel, are you?"

"Oh, sir, in the name of honest, sincere and pure womanhood, I beg you to believe that she who prostrates herself before you is innocent of any knowledge whatever that she was the cause." Luda regarded his face for a moment as if to read his thoughts. One look of pity had raised in her a hope that he was too great a general to crush a woman's heart.

"Who, may I ask, was she who came so heroically to the rescue—who, a second later, would have received the two bullets? This could not have been yourself?"

"It was I, general, who felt it a duty to prevent the spilling of blood. The paper which you now hold I picked up from the floor of Colonel de Mai's

room. Not stopping to consider anything but that I might save life, I went to the spot indicated in the challenge. You know the result."

"However much I would like to please you, your appeal is absolutely impossible to grant, even though I note by this challenge that I have been misled. Yet the man is a Federal officer, and our prisoner—this fact alone is sufficient to prevent our action in the matter."

"I beg, implore you, dear sir, do not say impossible. Let me say: I am Luda Grey, of Virginia; my home is near Ivywild, the former home of Colonel de Mai. I was a student at Miss Carter's school until she was forced to close; then I became, as did she and her dear old aunt, a volunteer nurse, ready to do our best for fallen heroes, giving our services in the field where women may work. On the battle-field, at your great command, death may come to hundreds. After the battle is over, at my teacher's command we humbly try to save life. Won't you believe me? Won't you believe Colonel de Mai not guilty—and won't you free him for my sake?"

"Refusing you again, I must also add that men fight in war to conquer, not specially to kill. But yours is a most worthy, most noble effort. I have heard of the gracious work of Miss Carter and her capable aids, one of whom, they tell me, is called by our boys 'the occult girl'—a girl whose very presence seems to possess curative power, to assuage suffering. The self-sacrificing enlistment of these noble women I heartily endorse; and myself have great cause to respect them; especially do I regard as an incomparable blessing this wonderful power of 'the occult girl.' How I should like to know her! And if it were my prerogative, not a question of war, how I should like to please you!"

"How I thank you, general, for this inspiring

compliment. The soldiers sometimes called me 'the occult girl.' But my only mission in the field has been for the good I might do others. We know no favor, we have no views as to the political reasons for this conflict—or convictions as to which is right, North or South—we simply try to render more comfortable the lives of wounded men—to do the work of our Master, who had compassion on all the world's suffering."

"Are you the 'occult girl'?" looking her full in the face and extending both hands. "Is it possible that I really speak to 'the occult girl'—to her whom God in His love has endowed with a peculiar power? Rise, rise—you, an almost miracle-worker, must not prostrate yourself thus to me—you, who nursed my own boy back to health! No, no—soldiers, even officers, sometimes pray, you know, and my prayer is that God will bless you three-fold—grant you all the good things of life. And oh, that heart, not rule nor reason, were my guide in responding to your request!"

"I remember, general, your son was badly wounded."

"Yes, and you, the little 'occult girl,' never for a moment relinquished hope; never left his bedside when you could avoid it, always encouraged him, bidding him be brave even after the surgeons pronounced him beyond recovery. For this, we—his mother and I—owe you more than we can repay." His soft gray eyes filled as he turned away. For a moment neither spoke. The great commander left Luda standing, and walked toward the row of tents near; returning, he took her two hands, looked into her eyes, and said, slowly, quietly: "The 'occult girl' asks much, but it must be granted, no matter at what cost—anything, except she should want to

dissolve the Confederacy." And a serious smile softened his noble face.

"Come, Ford, take this message to prison quarters." Sitting down, he wrote rapidly, talking meanwhile. "Colonel de Mai is to be exchanged—not sent to prison, but sent North as early as possible. See to it that this order is carried out with dispatch. The time is limited; he may be even now in preparation. Quick, now."

"Oh, please, general, won't you give the order to me? Allow me to be your messenger?" said Luda imploringly, extending her hands, with an indescribable glow on her countenance. "And may I not see Colonel de Mai—even for one moment?"

"As it is too late to admit outsiders to the prison to-night, my aide must bear this order. But I will write a pass for to-morrow which will, I hope, compensate for your disappointment."

Tears of joy glistened on her long lashes as she took the general's hand and, kissing the fingers that had written the reprieve, whispered, "God be your leader!"

CHAPTER LII

UNDER THE FLAG OF DIXIE

Armed with official permission to see Guy, Luda left the hospital the following morning and walked along the railroad in the direction of Atlanta for some distance before reaching the Confederate camp. Reports of the charitable work at Carter Hospital had long preceded her; soldiers who had been cared for there having said many beautiful things in praise of their treatment by the volunteer nurses; more especially did they speak of Miss Grey, frequently calling her "angel of mercy," "the occult girl," etc.

Recognized by the officer to whom she presented her letter, he rose, and at a gesture from him others did likewise; so, as Luda Grey passed through the tented city every officer and private stood with bared head.

In a tumble-down log hut, moaning deliriously, Guy tossed on a bed of rough boards, going over and over the events that had culminated in his facing in duel a rival for the hand of the only woman for whom he considered life worth living. In the midst of these ravings she entered the shack. She sat down by his bunk, and when she could master her feelings, spoke soothingly to him. Opening his eyes and smiling faintly, he reached out both his hands. "Why, Luda, who fetched you here?" Almost immediately he became lost in the maze of delirium, murmuring, "Too late, too late!"

Endeavoring to reassure him, she threw aside her scarf, straightened his pillow, and took his hand, gently pushing back his ruffled hair.

After a time, realizing that he was incapable of understanding anything she might say to him, she penciled a line, to be given him when he should waken from a deep and apparently restful sleep, into which he had suddenly fallen under her soothing influence; and with a word to the officer in whose hands the general's orders had been placed, she departed.

On Thursday, having sent a darkey ahead laden with food and bedclothing, she went again. No objection was raised to padding the prisoner's cot, so, despite the dreary surroundings, he had been made comparatively comfortable.

Greatly improved, he awaited her coming, and his greeting was touching. Clasping her hand, he said, "This is the happiest moment of my life, Luda. But it is in your power to make me happier still. Won't you give me that promise for which I've waited so long? Promise to be my wife. I *must* know that you are to be mine alone—that I am to take you away from here."

While her heart echoed and re-echoed the promise, her calm face was no index to her thoughts.

Taking a ribbon bow of delicate pink from an inside pocket, he asked, "Do you recognize this, Luda, dear? I know you do not, but it was once yours. I found it entangled on the briars of a rosebush near the sycamore where I last saw you in the Sandy Valley. Heaven only knows how I've treasured it, though it's all faded now. Through all my experiences and service this little memento has seemed a part of you, Luda, and when in the depths of despair, I imagined it somehow whispered hope, encouragement to my weary heart."

"There, now you will rest," she said, readjusting his pillows, while in her breast the brightest glory of the sun, monarch of earth, sea and sky, seemed

shining, penetrating her very soul with its warmth.

"Oh, yes, my head may rest; but my heart never, until you say that one word I so much desire to hear. 'Hope deferred maketh'—ah, you must know my poor heart has been sick for my little one for whom I have so long mourned. It is said I may be going North soon—but wanting you, always wanting you. Though I've never wanted you as to-day, Luda, to-morrow I shall want you more—such is my love. And I can only wait with a degree of patience when I have your assurance we are to part no more. Sit nearer to me; let your hand rest in mine, while I tell you of my almost unbearable sorrow at your loss, my despair when all supposed you drowned that memorable night. Oh, that awful grief, that unspeakable suspense! Since the hour I first saw you under the cherry tree, your picture has been indelibly imprinted on my memory, and wherever I have gone I had only to close my eyes to see you again as then."

"Yes, I, too, have never forgotten that day. I seem to have reckoned all things in my life from that time." An inspired glory manifested itself in her soul, and a heavenly feeling of serenity encompassed her.

"As for dear Nathalie—perhaps it was love on my part; but it was such a different love. Yet, if ever heaven's doors opened to receive its own, they opened for Nathalie. Her death unfolded to our hearts the possibilities of a thrice beautiful life beyond the pale of mortal death. And even while she was bidding us farewell, and begging that we realize that death was only the opening gate of eternal life, she spoke consciously of angel friends about her who had come to take her away. There was a strangely sweet tie between Nathalie and me. But, with the never-to-be-forgotten truth told you at Ivy-

wild, Luda, dear, you alone are heart of my heart, soul of my soul."

Though four years had elapsed since he had uttered those words to her before, time could not eradicate from her memory the sweetest words ever spoken to woman. But, to change the drift of his thoughts, lest the excitement be too much for him in his weakened condition, Luda spoke of his going home and of how happy his parents and sisters would be.

"I must not talk of my going, nor of anything but you—of my love, Luda, the one only source of peace for me now. Nathalie was fond of you, dear. She begged me that last day of her life to find you—make you my wife. May I hope that her wish is your will to-day—may I, sweetheart?"

Joining her free hand with the one he was holding, she looked tenderly into his eyes meeting the adoration in their blue-gray depths as he repeated again and again, "I need you, Luda—I need your love. You are my best physician; you cure my heart, and a whole heart makes a man strong."

"I thought," she said, smiling, "that you wished to entrust your heart to me."

"Ah, my little angel, my heart is yours—long in your keeping."

He drew both her hands to his lips, covering them with kisses as, amid the rude surroundings of a Confederate prison, Luda Grey whispered the one word which bound their troth—and the mysterious voices that once came from the foaming waters of the Big Sandy whispered an echoing "Yes."

CHAPTER LIII

THE REGIMENT INVISIBLE

Transformed by recent events, Luda's heart overflowed with joy. There was to-day in her face a new brilliancy; a new light sparkled in her tranquil eyes.

Entranced by the glory of the western heavens while the waning sun sank lower and lower, she stood on the veranda till only the red-gold rim agleam, spread softest lights around her. Breaking from a trellis a stem on which bloomed two moss roses, she wandered leisurely toward the gate in subtle enjoyment of their odor mingled with the life-giving fragrance of the pines and luxuriant shrubs bordering the pathway.

The atmosphere, flowers, trees, even the blue sky, reechoed the joy within her soul that afternoon.

The influence of that one moment when for the first time she had confessed her love to Guy—told him how sad her heart had been made on leaving home and all she loved—clung to her. He had asked her to be his wife, and she recalled his precious words. Then, too, she would soon be going back home. It was little wonder the splendor of Nature appealed to her so bountifully.

Thus in sweet meditation, she paused by the great wooden gate, resting her hand upon the post.

The whistle of a locomotive awoke her from her happy reverie.

A north-bound train bearing two flags, a banner of white floating over them, moved by, and discerning that handkerchiefs were being waved from the car windows, she fluttered her own, wondering

at the same time why her heart should throb so violently as the train passed from sight. And why should she suddenly feel so oppressed as the crimson splendor of the western sky melted to serenest gray?

"Thus earthly visions fade," she said sadly. "To-day, fair things bloom—to-morrow, they are ashes of roses."

Mounting the steps she sighed at the approach of wagons and men with stretchers. It meant new work—a new lot of maimed heroes.

"Miss Grey, don't you know you are late for supper. We were searching for you everywhere," said a waiter, "and a messenger from General Hood's headquarters wants you."

The man handed her a note. "Luda dearest," it read, "I, with others, am to be exchanged at Louisville. We leave at once—until formalities have been complied with, under guard. In happy anticipation, I am feasting upon hope of your speedy return to the Big Sandy. Sometime, we may, as one, thank the noble general for my release. Faithfully, Guy."

"Gone!" She re-read the letter, brief in form, vital in significance—her first line from Guy de Mai. As she deposited it in her bosom nearest her heart, it seemed a link to bind them closer, a treasure, a part of himself.

Not relishing her supper, Luda sought the wards. With mind vibrant to the needs of the new sufferers, she wandered from one to another, kneeling to dress a wound, changing the position of the restless, performing endless offices of tenderness. A lad, a drummer boy in blue, whose fair hair and baby skin evidenced refined origin, watched her wistfully as she paused here and there; he saw her as with a surprised exclamation she fell on her

knees by the cot of a dying soldier opposite—heard her say, "Christ is your Meditator. He will forgive—I forget," and then commend the departing spirit as it went before a higher tribunal—

"Rest eternal grant unto him.
Let light perpetual shine upon him!"

Tenderly lying her handkerchief over the eyes now closed in the last sleep, she gently crossed the hands upon the still bosom. It was Captain Louns, who, fearfully torn by a bursting shell, had been born in upon a stretcher a few minutes before.

"One more hero of the South has given his life," she whispered, while unbidden, yet unrestrained tears filled her eyes.

"I'm goin' too, nurse," said the drummer boy, as she turned toward him. "Lots of soldiers are following that General, ain't they? My mother told me about that Leader when I used to say my prayers at her knee. I'm goin' to join him now. God took our mother. Then father bought us a new one; but she didn't love sis and me. So I ran away with Sherman. I'm only a little drummer, you see, but my music encouraged the boys and we marched together. I wouldn't mind goin', for mother's there—only—she told me to look after sis, and if I hadn't gone to war I wouldn't have been shot away from her. Do you think when mother sees me she might blame me for disobeying her? I feel guilty like."

Luda took his small hand and held it firmly, endearingly, as she reassured him.

"A little while ago when I was sort o' sleepin' I guess, and you passed by, I thought I saw mother and sister walking with you; but they didn't stay. I wonder if mother knows her Jamie is coming. I

wish she would come back and go with me—so everything wouldn't be so strange."

He laid back the collar of his woolen shirt, exposing a ragged wound. "You see, the gun got me here. In my knapsack there're sister's letters and a picture. The shadow is mother, as we sat on her lap, and the picture man rubbed her face away. Send all my things to sis—the address is in her letters. But I haven't had a letter for a long time. Tell her—brother—will get—a furlough—from—and—but—"

A smile of recognition flooded his bloodless face; his lips curled as in a kiss. "Why, mother, sister! Why I—thought you was dead, mother! You say there is no death! Then, what took you away from us?"

Leaning lower, Luda caught a last faint whisper, "I'm goin'—home—with—you—mother." The words died on his lips but the smile remained, making beautiful the body of his humiliation as the dainty drummer boy enrolled in the regiment that loses no recruit.

CHAPTER LIV

LUDA LEAVES CARTER SEMINARY

News of marching battles was heralded over the country as August wore on, each army having its hour of pressing forward or falling back—success or failure. But Luda had one happy assurance—Guy had left the army; and therefore to her the roaring of cannon and bursting of shell lost their greatest terror. Though she worked not less conscientiously, it was with the calm philosophy of the professional.

It was not until after Sherman had entered Atlanta and issued his edict that the Confederate forces fell back, greatly depleted, woefully discouraged. The beginning of November it was at last deemed safe for her to undertake the journey north, which would be by rail through Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky to Louisville; thence by boat to Cincinnati, and with only one other change up the Ohio, the Big Sandy, to her home.

The last days were sadly busy ones. In silence she dismantled the chamber that had been her place of rest, study and meditation. Within its walls she had mastered the courses of the curriculum. Over the desk hung her class pictures and the medals she had won. As she removed them, and the various keepsakes from school friends, her manuscripts and beloved books, there flitted through her mind a panoramic view of the unusual things that had happened to her from the time she had appeared in the Sandy Valley to the present. Looking back over her young life, a sort of uncertain

feeling found way to her heart but she resolved not to receive it—to entertain happy thoughts only.

"How joyous one should be at the thought of going home!" she said as Miss Carter entered. "But," and tears gushed to her eyes, "I am leaving you, my dear preceptress—you who found me so helpless and stupid, and did so much for my advancement and happiness."

"But you are soon to be with your own, my dear, which is for your greater happiness," said Miss Carter, gently clasping the girl's hands.

"Yes, with my own—and with *him*," Luda repeated to herself.

The gong sounded for her last meal at Carter Seminary impressing her with a funereal lonesomeness, as she turned the key in her trunk.

She visited the few disabled soldiers in the wards, receiving messages to convey to families and friends; and at eleven o'clock was back in her room, where none of her personal belongings remained except her traveling requisites. With a dejected air she walked to the window. The country about was clothed in darkness with only now and then the brilliancy of a firefly to brighten the gloom.

"I wonder why Miss Carter did not say good-bye? She has been so much to me, so good, how can I go without a word of farewell? Oh dear, dear, to-morrow, next day and one day more and I shall be far away—at home, with mother. Will she forgive me when I tell her all?" she queried, tugging at the window cord. "Will she realize I acted for the best? I wonder what Claudia will say? And they all thought I was lost that awful night! I never even dreamed that they might think that. Poor mother! how my selfishness has made her suffer!"

A sharp rap on the door startled her.

"Come; come in."

It was the dear old aunt with a steaming hot julep. "To quiet your nerves, dearie, and make you sleep. The man will call you in time."

"Oh, how dear of you! Won't you stop awhile, auntie?"

"No, no, child. You should retire at once. I'll say good-bye when the hack comes that takes you to the train." And the door gently closed behind the thoughtful woman.

Gazing around the dismantled room, Luda slowly sipped the julep. "I suppose it is natural that one should be sad when school days are over. But why should I feel such a sinking at the heart as if everything in life had come to an end, when really best things for me are only beginning. By social demands I am now fitted to be Guy's wife; yet education, circumstances, cannot change the fact that I am still the poor fruit-dryer's daughter. And my heart rejoices that God's work cannot be undone."

The words froze on her lips; in the little square mirror on the wall she caught her reflection and, peering over her shoulder, another face—one that she had never seen before—an old woman's wrinkled, wizened and distorted. Luda averted her eyes, but in the dim recesses of the dormer window the creature re-appeared, thin, diminutive, draped in blackest black; her bony fingers clutching a cord as if she sought to break it asunder.

Between the clouds a sheen of moonlight swept through the window slowly transforming the black robes to filmiest white, and instead of the skeleton-like apparition there appeared an image of radiant youth. But the beautiful vision of life and loveliness quickly faded to misty moonbeams.

Awed beyond expression, Luda sat for a moment

spellbound, her chin resting in her hands, her eyes intently riveted on the spot where both had vanished.

Instinctively her thoughts turned to Guy. "What can it portend? No, no, I will not allow myself to believe it is of him; he is safe at home. My brain is over-wrought; and I must think no more to-night."

Lifting the cup to her lips she tossed the contents down her throat. "It is a bitter draught; but, as auntie said, it may bring an hour's sleep—dear auntie, always so good!" But she did not banish the impression her uncanny visitors had made upon her mind until forgetfulness came with her last short sleep in the stricken South.

CHAPTER LV.

LUDA'S RETURN

Claudia Howard had been an almost daily visitor at the Grey cottage. Her parents had died within a few months of each other soon after the departure of their sons to fight and risk their lives for the principles of Secession. Facing the serious problems of life alone, the former light-hearted girl had become even more womanly than was usual for one of her type. She loved Jack Grey with an increasing devotion, their marriage being now only a question of his coming safely through the war. Even though he had cast in his lot with the Union, her brothers, cognizant of the fact that she had refused numerous offers, some from men of distinction, men who favored the continuance of slavery, interposed no further objections to her loyalty to Jack.

Nan Smith and Claudia were saying good-bye to Mrs. Grey after a call one day when the whistle of the day-boat was heard in the distance.

"It may be that Luda is on that boat," volunteered the widow, "so I will walk down to the landing with you." Possessed with the intuition that her daughter was coming, an expression of joyous hope lighted the face whereon sorrow had written its indelible inscription.

Somehow it seemed inappropriate to talk; and the three, Claudia on one side of the frail woman, Nan on the other, made their way along the grass-lined path to the river as silently as if walking to muffled music; for Luda's return suggested the solemnity of a resurrection.

As they neared the wharf a majestic looking

young woman tripped lightly down the gang-plank.

"Mother," she said, as she reached them, "I have come to bring back your long lost daughter. Will you receive the child?" and half laughing, half weeping, fell into her mother's arms.

CHAPTER LVI

MAJOR DE MAI INTERPOSES

Major de Mai objected seriously when his son, the colonel, who had been unexpectedly called to Washington, confided to him his wish to marry the daughter of Widow Grey.

"In heaven's name, Guy, put it out of your mind; it can never be. Spare your mother the pain of ever discussing such a mésalliance. She will never give her consent, I know. The mere thought of it would be to her a mortification beyond words to convey. Why, my boy, you married to a Grey! 'twould break her heart. Think of who you are, what strides you have made, the honorable mention of Colonel de Mai—and then to wed a journeyman's daughter, a girl of nowhere! It is shameful, Guy. It had been better you had never gone to military school."

"But, father, you do not understand; she is not the Luda Grey you knew. She is an educated, accomplished lady, with a better mind—even without a name—than any other woman I have ever met. She has been in Carter Seminary for four years; and you know what that means to one who seemed superior to mere schooling—whose very life placed upon her inestimable value."

"Carter Seminary! How? By what means? In the capacity of a—." The major stopped.

"A student, father—one of whom the whole faculty was proud."

"A student, eh? Carter Seminary or not, you know your mother's ideas as to birth and class; and you must remember you are our only son, Guy—that we look to you to sustain our name."

"Yes, father, I know. And wh'le I appreciate the force of all you say, my love for Luda Grey is absolutely unconquerable. Life to me would be empty, nothing—without the girl I love as my wife. Besides, a man can be a greater factor in the world, a greater success, in all the walks of life, if he has by his side, a wife he idolizes for his daily companion, his inspiration. Won't you try to think a little more calmly, a great deal more kindly? And won't you persuade mother to regard it in a different light? She undoubtedly desires my happiness. Neither of you will ever regret it, take my word for that. On the contrary, I believe you will live to be proud—aye, sir, doubly proud of Luda Grey as your daughter, for, in some manner blessed with unusual grace and strength of character, she is queen of women. And, father, you must remember I am not a boy. For five years I have suffered more—a thousand times more than I could ever tell you, or than mother or you could ever understand. I admit my confession has been a long time coming—but the fact of the matter is that I have loved Luda Grey ever since before I went to West Point. It was infatuation for her that awakened in me the desire to gain a higher education, to make a name; and to her I owe primarily all that I have made myself. To be a great man is honorable, I know; but to be a good husband adds dignity to a man's life such as nothing else can."

Moved to the depths by his son's arguments, the major turned away, but after a moment's thought replied, "Well, in view of all you have said, my son, and recognizing that it is your only road to happiness, I will speak to your mother. But I scarcely expect a favorable answer. And even if we should obtain from her a reluctant consent, I believe she will in her heart always feel you have lowered

the family by such marriage. She is not to blame, Guy; it is her bringing up."

"But tell me, father, why should the fact of the deceased John Grey having been a fruit-dryer make to a christian man or woman any difference in his daughter since she herself is fitted to adorn any social position? Besides, no one can attack Mr. Grey's character. He was an honest, God-fearing man, was he not? You must admit that his son is a man to be proud of. Jack Grey is a noble fellow. And besides, father, you are aware that we live in *Ohio* now."

"Oh yes, yes; but—the truth is, my boy, I've heard it hinted that this girl is not the daughter of John Grey. It has been observed in her neighborhood that she always seemed superior to her surroundings. And too, her mother appears to have also been misplaced in her youth. There is something we cannot understand; there is a mystery in the Grey family; I am sure of it."

"My God, father, who would dare to make a statement of this sort, and throw calumny on a family so helpless! Before heaven, I will resent it though I bring upon myself the blood of the traducer! I will protect, even with my own life, the fair name of the woman I love."

"Silence, my son, silence! Remember to whom you speak. I simply relate to you confidentially a whispered report."

"I do remember to whom I speak, father, and always shall. But if you were in my place, would you be silent? I do not believe you would. I am sure the traditions of which you have just reminded me would force you to speak—force you to defend the name of the woman you loved."

Not wishing to agitate him further, the father adopted more conciliatory tactics. "Let us post-

pone discussions till you return from Washington. Meantime I will see what I can do for you. By careful suggestion, your mother might be coaxed to your point of view. We'll see, we'll see." Warmly shaking the boy's hand, the major turned away, a twinkle in his eye indicating pride in the determined stand taken by his soldier son.

CHAPTER LVII

IN THE SHADOW

Luda was not herself after her home-coming. She felt lanquid, tired; it was with painful difficulty she accomplished the few household tasks that at her request her mother had relinquished to her.

More adorable, she thought, than the most pretentious palace had become the little cabin home with its tall spreading maples, annual shrubs and flowers. With her own development it had grown most beautiful, surrounded as it was with the marvellous scenes of Nature's handiwork.

Sunday, after returning from church where she had listened to Dr. Hampton's scholarly eulogy upon "Woman in War," Luda walked alone to the drying yards. The rail fence stood open as when she had first seen Guy ride through it. The kilns and general features were the same, but no more could the activity of former days be revived; her father was gone, the slaves free.

As she stood under the cherry-tree and recalled the memorable afternoon when she had betrayed the anguish of her soul on that first meeting with the man soon to be her husband, she could but compare the girl in her teens with the woman of to-day. Wandering on, she found the log beside the road upon which he and she sat. The same blue sky shed its lights about her then; 'twas the same quiet shore where she had walked with him and watched the same silvery waters flecked with the waning sun's brilliant red rippling northward over the river's shell-lined channel. As she sat alone by

the water's edge, memories of the eventful past flitted through her brain, tingeing with sadness the songs of the birds and the rhythmic plash of the waterfall, yet producing in her a peculiar sensation of resignation. Perceiving the shadows settling over the valley, she suddenly rose and quickened her steps homeward.

Her mother awaited her at the gate with a dainty bunch of forget-me-nots in her delicate hands. "They are the last, and are for you, dear," she said. "And tea has been ready a long time."

"It was unforgivably selfish of me to leave you this Sunday afternoon when you were alone, mother dear—not even the song of a bird in the house to cheer your heart; but I had so longed to visit scenes of old. Come," she said, affectionately kissing the sad-faced mother, "come; we are to be companions hereafter. And when Jack returns we shall all be happy again."

"All," repeated the mother.

Luda did not partake of the appetizing food, promising to do it justice later; but the following morning found her in the shadow of death. Long concealed in her system malaria and jaundice contracted in the Georgia lowlands, now manifested themselves in cruel fever. Must she who had so bravely fought for the lives of others give up her own in the dawn of promise!

The neighborhood physician solemnly shook his head; the best medical talent of Catlettsburg and Louisa was enlisted; but the death-dealing germ of the swamp had preceded them. Her crimson cheeks, parched lips, inarticulate chattering, nonplused the physicians. Her life hung in the balance; and when hope of her recovery was finally abandoned, Claudia notified Guy and Jack.

Luda's last letter to Guy had been posted at Cin-

cinnati on her way home; one written by him en route to Washington, lay under her pillow.

The warm sun crept in at the small window, suffusing the bed whereon she lay with lips and eyes closed, delirium and fever gone; the flickering breath distinguishing life, could be detected only by the presence of moisture on a glass held above the pallid face by the physician who reluctantly acknowledged all would soon be over. The stricken mother staggered to the chimney-side. Entering the sick-room at that moment Joe Johnston handed her a letter marked "Important," and as he joined the speechless watchers about the bed, she broke the seal.

It was from Guy, and contained his formal request for the hand of her daughter.

CHAPTER LVIII

MYSTERIOUS JOURNEYING

After tossing in agony for many days, a sense of utter relaxation possessed Luda and she felt herself passing—leaving the body. She witnessed the physician shake his head in abandonment, heard the lamentations and sobs of her anguished mother, saw the look of despair come over the countenances of friends about her bed, but could not make known to them her joy; that in place of pain and depression, a feeling of buoyancy encompassed her in this state of absolute peace. A gauzy mantilla of white fell upon her shoulders, completely draping her. Resolving into mist, walls and roofs offered no resistance as in the embrace of Amarita she ascended skyward, triumphantly soaring far up among the restless white clouds. The earth below spread like a beautiful map; the stars like golden nuggets hung suspended in the vast vault of the universe.

Spanning aeons of time to dim ages past, and projected over leagues of space with the velocity of thought, she found herself on the shores of the sacred Nile where a royal pageant with numerous court dignitaries escorted a chariot of state upon the magnificent driveway bordering that river. Within the princely equipage she recognized King Mena, his flaxon-haired Queen, Berenice, by his side.

She reviewed the deeds of centuries as the wonders of ancient Egypt unrolled themselves like a grand panorama—the rise and fall of dynasties; cities spring to greatness, crumble and decay; living beings flash into earth-life to depart like shoot-

ing stars; Memphis, founded by Mena, become a desolate ruin; and the great king's descendants deprived of power, strolling over the land, homeless gypsies.

A massive stone, avoided by boatmen as a menace to life, stood midway the historic river whose course had once been changed at the king's command. Through this moveless rock Luda entered a wonderful mausoleum far beneath the river, its winding corridors and sculptured recesses exceeding in grandeur all modern sepulchral monuments. In great caskets on shelves of alabaster and sandalwood reposed the remains of once-powerful kings whose deeds of prowess, recorded in hieroglyphics and picture-writings, stood forth upon the marble walls; while in the glory of immortality, their spirits—messengers between worlds—came and went at will. A subterranean passage of stucco and jeweled stones connected the silent depository with a magnificent park where hundreds of individuals moved hither and thither.

Recognizing that she had loved and been loved by this people, studied in their schools, worshipped in their temples—that they belonged to her, she to them—nothing was strange to Luda.

Just as the chimes in an old church of Seville pealed for vespers, an aerial chariot transported her from historic Egypt to sunny Spain. Lent had brought to this ancient edifice devotees from two worlds. Multitudes of disembodied souls occupying no space yet glorying in the princely service, were as visible to her as the calm faces of the communicants, holy priests, veiled sisters, altar boys with their trailing clouds of incense; all were to her as when in another flesh she had worshipped in this cathedral.

With the benediction the vapory chariot sailed

away upon the fleecy clouds, descending in the gardens of a quaint but imposing chateau in southern France.

Massive doors flew back as Luda passed through lofty halls adorned with exquisite statuary, luxurious drawing-rooms hung with richest tapestries, to a vast library containing priceless Vernis Martin cases. Among the richly-framed portraits upon its walls was one of a young woman whose beautiful face appealed to the girl, awakening in her soul a sensation of incomparable devotion, a subtle essence of mother-love.

By a huge mahogany table in the center of the room whereon a student lamp burned low, sat a man and a woman. They, like herself, were invisible to a distinguished-looking gentleman who entered from an inner chamber. Raising the light, he took from his pocket a letter bearing a foreign postmark and broken seal. After reading and rereading its contents with an air of perplexity, he paced the room, muttering in tones sometimes subdued, sometimes agitated.

"Father never forgave Eugenie; why should I?" Hesitating, "Ah, it is perhaps that I alone am left to represent him—and the Church commands, though the law no longer holds me responsible."

He threw himself into his spacious arm-chair and gazed thoughtfully into the lamplight. "Who is this Luda Grey—she who has so charmed Madame Olivares? Why should the daughter of a peasant wear the pearls of the Countess Eugenie? Ah," a gracious smile lighting his fine, dark face, "if this mademoiselle should be Eugenie's daughter—her child!" His eyes opened wide with delight, his lips curled in happy reflection.

But his face saddened as he again walked up and down the room reviewing the family portraits. "Oft

in memory I revert to our childhood days, Genie," he said, gazing at the fading canvas of the beautiful young woman's likeness. "A love cord draws me to you."

As he spoke, the two invisibles, and the misty image stepping from the heavily-chased frame, all embraced him in a pleading manner, and he must have felt the spirit presences of parents and sister as he continued. "What if you were ever in want, dear Genie—or died in an alien land! I seem to hear you implore me not to forget, and father's and mother's voices calling our names."

Then in deep thought: "Father Etienne alone knows the contents of this communication, and though the seal of the confessional would shield me—the son of a noble father, a christian mother, forget! Ah, never, never! From now henceforward I will seek my sister. I will find Genie—or hers."

Taking an atlas, he turned to a map of Virginia, a triumphant expression irradiating his handsome visage.

"I shall sail to America. Should I find Mademoiselle is Eugenie's daughter, then I shall be the happiest man in all France."

The library and its contents slowly melted away; and awakening as from a dream, Luda stood on the threshhold of her little cabin home, recognizing all about her, and wondering how she had ever escaped from the body now so still on the white bed.

CHAPTER LIX

"SHE IS GONE!"

Luda heard Claudia's call to the doctor, "Oh, oh, she is gone!" and Joe Johnston when he protested excitedly, "She ain't dead—she ain't dead." She tried to speak to him, and heard him say, "She calls, listen, listen!"

Peacefully she had left all behind, unaffected by their sorrow.

Joe made his way to the bedside, threw back the covering, readjusted the pillow, opened the window and faced the watchers who, astounded by such unseemly behavior in the presence of death, had gathered at the opposite side of the bed.

Pastor Hampton just arriving, remonstrated with Joe and tried to lead him away.

"It's Jack—and Guy de Mai!" Joe exclaimed, starting to meet two men, one in uniform, the other in black, hurriedly approaching the house. "They think so, but she didn't die, Jack. I forget what they call it but—she ain't dead, she ain't dead."

Gently thrusting him aside, Jack rushed into the house and kneeling by the bed called, "Sister, my dear sister!" But when she did not respond, with a gesture of despair to Guy he said, "We're too late. She is gone." And embracing his mother, he hid his face in silent prayer.

"Luda, Luda," pleaded Guy in an agony of love that would not give up. "Luda!" Leaning tenderly over her, he pressed his lips to her forehead, listened breathlessly an instant—then raised his hand to still the mother's sobs.

The warmth of true love had accomplished more than the skill of doctors.

During the brief interval that had elapsed after Luda in astral form had torn away from her material self, and the friends still stood weeping around her bed, her experiences equalled ages. But now she had returned and was with them. Though free from the sorrows, trammels and suffering of the body, she felt its fascination. Would she return to live again in the old way? Would she disturb the form lying so peacefully there?

Between her two selves appeared again the faded old woman in black, a reaper in hand, but resolving like a flash into a vision of youth and light, she balanced a golden scale. Called back by the power of love, Luda Grey's entranced spirit or astral self re-entered its mortal tenement, and slowly opening her eyes, she whispered, "Guy!"

CHAPTER LX

HIS ONE FAIR ROSE

In southern Ohio Ned Howard and Billy Downing led Lila-Lily to the altar early in May, grandma's death making a quiet wedding advisable. In the Valley of the Big Sandy the same month Dr. Hampton said the words that made Jack Grey and Claudia Howard husband and wife; while Jack in turn had married the Reverend Dr. Hampton and Nancy Jane Smith.

Guy, who had returned to Washington had not obtained the consent of his parents to his marriage with Luda. Though the father seemed almost ready to give his blessing, the mother persisted in saying "nay"; so he was quite disconsolate. Should he take Luda to wife disregarding their wishes he might not only lose their friendship but be disinherited as well.

Fully aware of this opposition, Luda felt chagrined, resentful, and did not recuperate as rapidly as her physician had hoped. Claudia, now a member of her family, came often to see her and was most companionable; while Jack read to the convalescent by the hour. But despite careful nursing and cheerful surroundings, her recovery was retarded.

June came in with tears and sunshine. The balmy air in the valley was permeated with the odor of flowers; the leafy mountainsides vibrated with the song of birds; all nature was clothed in joyous beauty. But it touched not the heart of Luda Grey nor lightened her depression. Over and over she

repeated the words of Amarita; again and again recalled the promise made in the little log prison down in Georgia. While not in the least doubting Guy, yet she could not quite forget the happenings of the past. One thing was sure—she would not go into his family an unwelcome daughter-in-law, and the opposition of his parents must be removed to her satisfaction before she would become the wife of Guy de Mai. Then too, she had an intuition that some time, some place, she had occupied a position quite different—that she had been his equal if not on a more exalted plane; and the mere thought of their objection made her ill.

Early in June Colonel de Mai was called to General Sherman's headquarters and notified of an order for the discharge of his regiment. After a few days in which to supply himself with citizen's outfit he left the army for his southern Ohio home. While he anticipated joy with his family, his heart was full of darkened forebodings when his mind turned to the bitterness of his mother relative to his making Luda Grey his wife. With her consent his sisters had both married men in gray, men who had taken up arms against the Union, against him; yet he must meet them at his home; and while all had been apparently forgiven in the hospital, it would probably be an irritant in the home life. All this impressed him deeply, and he felt the strain greatly. On his arrival, however, he found little estrangement in his intercourse with the two ex-officers of the Lost Cause, each refraining from any allusion to it whatever.

His father gave him little hope of gaining his mother's consent when her acceptance of Luda as a daughter was mentioned; and having no grandma now as a go-between he must himself speak to her on this subject so near his heart. How, he hardly

knew; for all his past life his wishes had been conveyed to his mother through the mediumship of father or grandmother. Finally, suppressing more agitation than he would have felt in leading a raid on a great opposing army. Guy de Mai, late colonel of a brave regiment, set himself to the task of conquering the prejudices of this, to him, most mighty woman of the old school.

Remembering how, when a youngster, he used to gather flowers for her sewing-table, he wandered into the garden where great beds of spice-pinks lined the walk. Gathering a huge bunch he went to the sitting-room where he found her busying herself with a piece of embroidery. From a vine covered with magnificent roses, that clambered over the corner of the veranda he had plucked one bright bud as he passed into the hall.

"Ah, mother dear," he said, as she looked up smiling, "these beautiful pinks are for you. But do you see this one rose—it is mine. There is only one flower for me, mother—one lovely rose. I want to own, love and care for it; and it is you who can cut the ban that keeps me from possessing that to me fairest of flowers. A word from you and your son—a boy in your presence, a man in the world—will be the freest, most happy slave who was ever bound to serve. It is Luda Grey, mother. I love her as it seems to me no man ever loved before. She saved my life else I could not stand before you to-day, a child again as it were, begging you and father to grant my one request—make me free to act."

Surprised beyond words, Mrs. de Mai did not reply, but rose to her feet beside her towering son. The major, just entering, needed only a glance to divine Guy's petition, as his wife, her marble-like face betraying great emotion, murmured in tones

almost inaudible, "Your father's wish, my son, shall be my will."

With his arm around the waist of his life-companion, and grasping Guy's hand, the old major asked, "What wilt thou, my son?"

"Luda, father—Luda Grey. She, with mother, you and the sisters, is all I ask under the canopy of heaven."

"Then," his voice quivering, "answering for us both, Guy, fetch her; she is worthy the best man in the North. You have our blessing. Through Billy and Ned we have learned of this girl's untiring efforts in behalf of the sick and wounded soldiers. Bring her home, she shall be our daughter, we shall love her."

"Only for her, father and mother dear, your son would most probably have perished in Andersonville—a thing I did not know until permitted at Washington to read the Confederate order for sending me there, and the rescinding of the same through her appeal."

Guy was overjoyed. He must see Luda as nearly at once as time and distance would permit. But discharged Confederates having returned home, it was by no means agreeable to contemplate meeting them on their own ground, so he was not at all sure of his safety in making the journey to the Sandy Valley. The influence of Minister Jack, as well as that of the Howards, he hoped would favor him; and he had passed through too many dangers to have any fear now. However, the boat landed him ashore without the least interference, and once more, as a plain citizen, Guy de Mai visited his native county, and the soldier girl who had also heroically served in one of the greatest wars recorded in history.

CHAPTER LXI

LUDA EUGENIE DEL TORA

Softening the sun's gleam, pyramids of white clouds slowly floated above the mountain-tops where the tall pines in their garb of wholesome green stood, immovable soldiers, on these crested monarchs of the earth. It was Luda's wedding morn. She arose with the earliest chirp of birds in the trees, the earliest ray of morning light, and communed with the wealth of Nature's beauty surrounding her modest home.

Light breezes cooled by Autumn's first nod to field and dale, swept from the mountain, wafting the perfume of meadow and flower through the open window into the small room where Nan and Claudia would prepare her for the ceremony.

"Am I dreaming?" she asked herself. "Is Amarita's world opening its heavenly portals to me? Am I to be Guy's wife—to-day?"

How unspeakably dear were the dainty white robes which she handled with child-like enthusiasm! With what rapt expression her glorious eyes reflected her thoughts—reflected the happy state of her mind which was filled with tenderest passion! She had suffered; yes, but the ineffable joy in her heart to-day wiped away even the memory of suffering.

As the day wore to late afternoon and she heard the whistle announcing the stopping of the boat at Howard Landing, her gladness was almost tragic. Her pulse bounded with anticipation. The trees, the flowers, all Nature seemed to thrill with her happiness; yet no sign escaped her. Calmly she

remanded herself to the little chamber as she saw the approach of the guests. Admitted to her room, Guy chatted with her a few moments, then left her in care of her friends. As he came out, Rush, his valet, said to him in secretive manner, "Mistiss Grey say a gent'man wish to see Miss Luda in de big room, sah."

Notifying her, Guy attended her to the door, wondering at the same time why the summons should impress him so strangely.

His discomfiture was observed by Nan, now Mrs. Hampton, who remarked teasingly, "I trust the groom is not fearing a repetition of the Ginevra episode—that he'll never see Luda Grey again?"

Submerged in thought he smiled back but made no reply. The hour, the moment, for his union with the girl he adored had been timed and drew near.

Finding her mother in serious conversation with the gentleman, Luda paused an instant on the threshold. Sudden pallor swept over her cheeks, quickly followed by a flush of pink. "I have seen him! But where—when? Ah, in the palace! But why does he come here—and to-day?"

Possessed with a new fear—another separation—her very brain seemed to freeze in the persuasion that the stranger's visit could mean only some call to Guy, perhaps some new barrier to their marriage.

When the gentleman's great dark eyes met hers, almost counterparts of his own, he exclaimed, "Mon Dieu! c'est vraiment la fille de ma soeur!" and bowing low he placed his hand over his heart. "Genie, Genie!"

He had learned on board the steamboat of the approaching wedding, and his brief interview with Mrs. Grey had convinced him that Luda was truly the child of his lamented sister, Eugenie.

Until Mrs. Grey, now on the verge of hysterics,

had divulged in his presence the secret so long withheld—the death of her parents while she was yet an infant, Luda had not guessed his true mission.

"Mother dear," she said affectionately yet with deepest sympathy, "I love you dearly; and I confess my debt of gratitude is greater than I can ever pay, for you have been a real mother to me."

An image of grief, Mrs. Grey clung to her foster-child. The furrows of age and sorrow could not efface the expression of a kindly nature and an unbounded humanity that had impelled her to open her arms to the doubly-orphaned infant long before.

Visibly affected by this outburst of feeling, the gentleman turned his gaze from the four-by-eight window toward the lawn whereon might be seen the gathering guests. Regaining his composure, he took from his pocket a small black morocco case, opened it and scanning the picture within, studied Luda's face as if in comparison; then handed it to her.

It contained an old daguerreotype, and an expression of surprised recognition encompassed Luda's countenance as she gazed upon the old-fashioned likeness of a beautiful girl. "She whose face in the clouds seemed but a reflection of my own, whose hand guided the vine that landed me safely across the wild waters of the Big Sandy—whose form in shadow descended from the portrait on the wall in the library of the palace—my mother."

Mrs. Grey sent for Guy, and meeting him outside the door, acknowledged with broken sobs that it was not her child whom he was soon to wed. "Not Luda Grey, but an adopted child whose father was drowned by unfriendly Indians while fishing in

Louisiana; and her mother, whose story of noble birth and runaway marriage with a Spanish-Egyptian by birth, an employee of her father in the south of France, has just been confirmed by this man, her brother—passed away at my house, entrusting their babe to me."

This torrent of words was quite unintelligible to Guy who with surprise saw Luda in earnest conversation with a man of distinguished appearance—a stranger—and the hour at hand when she was to become his wife!

Luda stood unmoved, her face veiled in shadowed mysticism; a new expression was about her mouth, her eyes changing from red-brown to soft black. It was a different face. A new light gleamed beneath the long lashes as she realized the veil was being lifted—the heretofore impenetrable mists were being cleared away.

"Guy," she said, as she welcomed her soon-to-be husband to the presence of the dignified gentleman who rose to his feet, "let me present to you Count de la Montagne of France, my own mother's brother. Colonel de Mai, uncle."

"Ah, de Mai, de Mai? une famille noble de France," the gentleman exclaimed, grasping Guy's hand. "Parlez-vous francais? Non? Ma chere niece to me speak many delightful explanations of ze one she will zis day wed. I am gratified to haf zis so great plaisire, Monsieur de Mai. In one small hour mademoiselle, ma niece, shall become Madame de Mai, n'est-ce pas?"

Guy acknowledged his inability to fluently express in French his great happiness at Count de la Montagne's acquaintance, while as yet he could scarcely get through his head what it all meant.

The hospitality of the four-room cottage was taxed almost beyond its capacity; but the wedding

being an outdoor one, only intimates were admitted, the greater number remaining on the lawn. The invitations had been given in church by the Reverend Jack who, with his pretty wife, Claudia, had masterfully attended to every detail.

Begging to see his niece in her wedding gown before the ceremony, the count deftly fastened to her corsage a family treasure—a crown of jewels; and smiled graciously as his eye fell on the pearls and miniature pendant at her throat, his thoughts reverting to Madame Olivares' letter which had been the incentive to his presence in this part of the world.

At the stroke of six, from behind a mass of flowers and shrubbery, a primitive orchestra in soft tones sounded the coming of the bride. Count de la Montagne exhibited surprised admiration as his beautiful niece, followed by the lately-wedded twins, Lila-Lily, descended the two steps of the porch.

Pastor Hampton approached the small stable on which reposed a copy of the New Testament. With the uplift of his hands the company arose and stood under the boughs of the great spreading maples, Guy apart from the others.

On the arm of her noble uncle, Luda, in clinging mull draped with long, bridal veil, and preceded by a baby girl in white who scattered wild flowers in her path, came slowly across the lawn. Guy met her in front of the table behind which were three godly men, Hampton, Grey and Howard. After prayer, during which Luda's head was bowed, and Guy looked straight at the minister, the Reverend Hampton put the usual questions. "Who giveth this woman in marriage?" and the count placed her ungloved hand in that of her beloved Guy. A wondrous brilliancy flooded the lawn lately wrapped in the fast-falling shadows of the mountains behind

which sank the sun. Kneeling upon the cushioned grass while the ring was slipped upon her finger, a joyous smile illumined Luda's serious face; a glorious radiance as of a halo beamed around her head; and as the brightness faded back into twilight, she recognized, floating away with the filmy vapor her faithful guardians—Nathalie, Amarita, Mother.

Thus, in the presence of friends of two worlds, the occult girl's "I will" made Luda Eugenie del Tora the wife of one of the heroes of Sherman's memorable March to the Sea.

THE END

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